

COMMUNICATION THAT CONNECTS:
PREACHING TO A MULTIGENERATIONAL AUDIENCE

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To Jane Ellen,

I will never get over your love for me!

To Molly Grace and Nathan,

May you both passionately follow Christ!

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Daven Watkins

ABSTRACT

Much can be said of preaching, but fundamentally, it is the communication of God's Word to a particular group of people. While the Word of God never changes, the particular groups of people to which preachers speak are constantly changing. The American church is not as homogenous as it used to be. One of the great challenges for the contemporary preacher is to clearly speak to a multigenerational audience. The values, characteristics, life experiences, and perceptions of truth are drastically different between the generations. Simultaneously connecting with Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers, can overwhelm the savviest of communicators.

While it is true that effectively speaking to multiple generations simultaneously is challenging, it is not impossible. The outcome of this thesis-project is that preachers learn to connect their sermons to the various generations of listeners within their congregations. Not only will preachers learn to identify the four generations of people within the congregation, but also preachers will discover four ways to connect their sermons to the lives of the listeners.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MULTIGENERATIONAL DILEMMA

Identifying the Problem

Preachers must communicate to people. Much can be said of preaching, but fundamentally it is the communication of God's Word to a particular group of people. One of the great challenges for preachers today is the task of speaking clearly and effectively to a multigenerational audience. Many congregations have church attendees who range from eight to eighty-eight years of age. Each generation represented in the church has its own set of life experiences, values, languages, and characteristics. It is a daunting task for any preacher to proclaim a Word from God to all the generations in the audience. It is challenging enough to communicate effectively to one or two generations, but when many pastors stand to preach, there may be four generations of people looking back at them. At times the generational diversity can seem insurmountable.

If this scene describes your ministry setting do not despair. You are not alone. In countless churches across America, preachers continually ask, "How can I ensure that my sermon connects with the ninety-two year old World War II veteran, the forty-six year old woman who has recently gone through a devastating divorce, and a sixteen year old teenager who is struggling with an identity crisis?" Effectively speaking to multiple generations is challenging but it is not impossible. This thesis project will address the issue of preaching to a multigenerational congregation. The outcome of the project will be that preachers may more clearly and effectively communicate the Word of God to a multigenerational audience.

Generational Terminology

In an effort to establish common terminology throughout this project regarding the various generations, I will use the generational terms described by Gary McIntosh in his book entitled *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church*. The Builder generation describes people born before 1946. Literally, this generation of individuals helped to build the American society in which we live. The people born from 1947-1964 are called the Boomer generation. In the years that followed World War II, the birth rate boomed at an unprecedented rate. The Buster generation is the title given to the people born from 1965-1983. The population of this generation did not rival the numbers of the previous generation; therefore, some sociologists have called it a bust. The Bridger generation describes the generation of people who serves as a bridge between the 20th and 21st centuries and consists of individuals born from 1984-2002.¹

This growth in the number of generations is a recent phenomenon in the United States. Since 1900 the life expectancy in America has dramatically increased, and the primary causes of death have changed. At the beginning of the 20th century, many Americans did not live past the age of 65 because their lives often ended as a result of a deadly infectious disease. Over the last hundred years, death rates have dropped for all ages and especially for the young. In 2002 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that 78% of boys and 86% of girls born in America live to the age of sixty-five. “Today, the vast majority of children born in the United States can expect to live through childhood and into their eighth decade or

¹ Gary McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching all Ages in Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 24-26.

beyond.”² The U. S. Census Bureau reported that in 2004 there were 36.3 million Americans 65 years of age or older. It is predicted by the Census Bureau that by 2050 that number will have more than doubled to approximately 86.7 million people.³ According to these findings, it is clear that more people are living longer, healthier lives than ever before, and the numbers of people living longer, active lives have dramatically increased in the recent decades. One of the effects this has upon the church is that the multigenerational congregation is not a fleeting trend. The multigenerational congregation should continue to grow and expand well into the 21st century.

The Project

This thesis-project will assert that it is possible for a preacher to clearly communicate the Scripture to a multigenerational congregation. Chapter two of this project will provide a biblical and theological foundation for why preachers should be committed to reaching their multigenerational audiences. Chapter three will consist of a literature review of research available on understanding the various generations. Chapter four will be a two-session seminar of this material presented to local pastors and chapter five will be the evaluation of that teaching experience. This evaluation will be based upon feedback from the seminar participants and personal observations made throughout the process.

The concern of this thesis project is not with the stylistic differences that some preachers undertake in an effort to reach the various generations (i.e. the use of

² Gorina Y., Hoyert D., Lentzner H., and Goulding M., “Trends in Causes of Death Among Older Persons in the United States,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/nchs/agingact.htm, accessed April, 2007.

³ Unknown author, “Highlights in Minority Health May, 2006,” Centers for Disease Control (CDC), <http://www.cdc.gov/omh/Highlights/2006/HMay06.htm>, accessed April 22, 2007.

PowerPoint slide, sermon outlines projected onto a screen, more relaxed clothing attire, or exchanging the pulpit for a Plexiglas podium). I am more interested in helping preachers understand the values and identities of each generation and understanding how each generation listens to sermons. As mentioned above, the outcome of this project will be to conduct a seminar designed to help preachers more clearly communicate the Word of God to a multigenerational congregation.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Does the Bible provide any pictures of multigenerational preaching? Do we find any scriptural scenarios where the preaching and teaching of the Bible is conducted in a multigenerational setting? Does the Bible seem to target one particular generation over any other generation?

One of the greatest challenges for this thesis project is the apparent lack of a biblical mandate to preach to multiple generations simultaneously. There are numerous references throughout the Scripture imploring one generation to proclaim the works of the Lord to the next generation. An example of this is given in Psalm 78:4 where Asaph writes, “We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.” While much is said in the Scripture of a trans-generational call to convey God’s truth to the next generation, very little is written about the teaching of the Scripture to multiple generations simultaneously.

The challenge today of preaching to multiple generations represents a modern day phenomenon that was not obvious to the biblical authors of antiquity. However, what is clear is that the Bible consistently demonstrates concern for people of every age, and God continually shows that the Bible can be understood by people of every age and background.

Before his ascension into heaven, Jesus gave a command imploring his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations.⁴ The present participle form of the word “go” implies a continuous action meaning, “as you are going.” The word for

⁴ Matthew 28:19.

“nations” is the Greek word *ethnos*, which means various people groups. Jesus has commanded his church to make disciples of all people groups regardless of race, nationality, creed, gender, and even age.

This does not represent a shift or change in God’s demeanor in dealing with the world. God has always been concerned with making disciples of all people. The hard lesson in the book of Jonah was that God cared for the people of Nineveh as much as he cared about his people and his chosen servant Jonah. The last sentence of the book conveys God’s compassion as he asks his sulking prophet, “But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”⁵

The Apostle Peter affirms God’s gracious patience with all people when he writes, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”⁶ It is clear in the Scripture that God’s genuine care is for all people regardless of even their age.

In Jesus’ ministry there was always a place not only for adults but also for children. Jesus was adamant about the valuable place of the younger generations in God’s kingdom. In Luke 18:15, the biblical author writes, “People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them.” It was not uncommon in the first century for mothers to bring their babies to a famous rabbi to be blessed. In Luke 18:15-17, two words are used to describe these young children. The first word, *brephos*, is the

⁵ Jonah 4:11.

⁶ II Peter 3:9.

same word used by Luke in the birth narrative of Jesus. The angel said to the shepherds, “This will be a sign to you; You will find a *baby* wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”⁷ [italics added]. Some of these important people in Jesus’ kingdom were infants. In Luke 18:16, we read that Jesus “called the children to him.” In that statement Luke employed a second term for children, which could refer to either an infant or child. This second word is used once in verse sixteen and an additional time in verse seventeen. Apparently there were children of all ages coming to Jesus. Some mothers were carrying their young infants while other children came to Jesus on their own when he called for them. When the disciples saw this onslaught of children walking, crawling, and toddling to Jesus, they rebuked them. As Paul Borgman writes, “children were of such little social standing in Luke’s day that a person would incur disgrace for paying much attention to them, particularly in public. Protecting Jesus from having to deal with children would have been a common and even commendable response.”⁸ Yet Jesus rarely responded in the socially acceptable manner. He rebuked his disciples for their rebuke of the children. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”⁹ In Mark’s version of the story, the author revealed Jesus’ passion for this generation. He said that Jesus was “indignant”¹⁰ when he saw his disciples rebuking the children.

The ability of children to receive the Lord’s attention and instruction is not only seen in the ministry of Jesus, but it is also confirmed in the Old Testament. The

⁷ Luke 2:12.

⁸ Paul Borgman, *The Way according to Luke: Hearing the Whole Story of Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 106.

⁹ Luke 18:16.

¹⁰ Mark 10:14.

instruction of God was not just for adults. The commands of the LORD were understandable even to children. Following the giving of the Ten Commandments, the LORD commanded his people to carefully obey all of his laws and decrees. The purpose of their obedience was “so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.”¹¹ Brueggemann writes that the LORD required obedience in Deuteronomy 6:1 so that the children in Deuteronomy 6:2 may learn to fear and obey.¹² Brueggemann continues, “The tradition has in view an intergenerational community of those who live out a radical vision of covenant. Deuteronomy always has its eyes on the children, on the coming generation.”¹³

The LORD commanded his people to saturate their lives with reminders of God’s law. The commandments were to be engraved upon their hearts, talked about when they sat, walked, and even relaxed. They were to be tied as symbols upon their hands, bound upon their foreheads, and written on the doorframes of their homes.¹⁴ Moses even gave instructions to parents regarding the inquiring minds of their children. Moses wrote, “In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?’ tell him: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’”¹⁵ Moses knew that an obedient faith would evoke questions from children. The teachers of the community and the parents were not to deny the

¹¹ Deuteronomy 6:2.

¹² Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 82.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 6:20-21.

children saying, “I can not tell you now because you can’t understand it. Just wait until you are older and I will then tell you the secrets of the kingdom.” These commands, laws, and stipulations from God were understandable for people of all ages. When the children asked questions regarding the Exodus, the teachers were to teach the words and acts of God. Brueggemann is correct when he writes:

The teaching community is in a life-or-death struggle for the heart, commitment, or imagination of the younger generation...This text asserts that the community is at risk when the younger generation is alienated. Israel has always known that the claiming of the next generation is no automatic process but requires great intentionality.¹⁶

The book of Proverbs speaks to that intentional instruction of the younger generation. Proverbs is organized as a collection of parental lectures given to a son. These lectures consist of wise teachings from the LORD’S commands. In Proverbs 1:8 we read, “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.” This identical phrase is repeated again in Proverbs 6:20. Bruce Waltke argues that since the book of Proverbs does not specify a particular son, the father’s lectures are universally appropriate to every family in Israel. Waltke further comments that this is similar to the way Moses gave universal instructions to all of Israel’s parents in Deuteronomy 6:1-6.¹⁷ Whybray is uncertain whether the terms for father and son should be taken literally or symbolically. These terms could also be used to describe the relationship between a teacher and his student. Whybray sites II Kings 2:12 as an example of such a usage. In that passage, Elisha watches his teacher Elijah being taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire. Elisha, the student, cries out to his teacher saying, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!”

¹⁶ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 92-93.

¹⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 186.

Yet in spite of that example, Whybray concludes that the Proverbs passage was addressing family relationships since the instruction of the father is immediately balanced with the teaching of the mother.¹⁸ Waltke agrees that the Godly instructions from the book of Proverbs are given within the context of the family. He further argues that within this passage is the affirmation of the father's leadership in the home and the realization that both parents have an "authoritative voice" with reference to the biblical instruction of their children.¹⁹ The author of Proverbs likens the instruction and teaching given to a child as a wreath given to the victorious soldier after a victory over the enemy. The child's obedience to the teaching of God's Word will give him victory over the adversary. The wise son heeds the biblical teaching of his father and mother for "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."²⁰

Consistent throughout the Scriptures is the clear description of God's compassion for all people. One of the ways he demonstrated his love for the world was by the gracious gift of his Word. Throughout history the LORD has blessed the teaching and preaching of that Word. Teaching the biblical truth is not merely an exercise for adults. The Bible can be understood by people of every generation.

The Bible does contain examples of multigenerational church life. The clearest biblical picture of a multigenerational congregation is described in the Pastoral Epistles. In these letters Paul gives instruction to both Titus and Timothy regarding how to teach the multiple generations.

¹⁸R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 37.

¹⁹ Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15*, 186.

²⁰ Proverbs 1:7.

After Paul and Titus had evangelized the island of Crete, Titus was left on that Mediterranean island with instructions to start a church. The people of Crete were known for their lying, laziness, and gluttony.²¹ With those characteristics as the moral backdrop of that society, Paul instructed his son in the ministry to appoint elders, teach the faith with integrity, and be an example that would affect the life of outsiders. At the beginning of chapter two Paul writes, “But you must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.”²² Literally, Paul tells the young preacher to “speak teaching that is fitting and healthy.” This teaching is directed to people of various ages. Paul gives instructions regarding the older men, older women, younger women, and younger men.²³ Lea and Griffin comment that the Greek term, *presbuterion*, translated as “older men” conveys no specific age. “Generally speaking, this group may have referred to men of an age sufficient to have raised a family and seen their children begin families of their own.”²⁴ Likewise they argue that the term for “older women” would have referred to women whose children were raised and on their own establishing their own home.²⁵ Gordon Fee does not necessarily agree with Lea and Griffin. Fee refers to Philo and Hippocrates in his interpretation of these Greek terms. Hippocrates understood the term *presbuterion* to refer to the sixth of seven periods of a man’s life, which would be equivalent of fifty to fifty-six years of age. Philo used this word to describe a man over sixty years of age. Fee also argues that it

²¹ Titus 1:12-13.

²² Titus 2:1.

²³ Titus 2:2-8.

²⁴ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *The New American Commentary Vol. 34 1,2 Timothy Titus* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992), 297.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 299.

would have been from this group of individuals that Titus would have selected and appointed elders for the church.²⁶

Titus was instructed to teach the older generations of men and women. Paul gave instructions that the older women were to train the younger women. The Greek word for *train* literally means to bring someone to his senses and to encourage, advise, or urge an individual. In all likelihood, Paul gave these instructions as a safeguard for his young son in the ministry. The last thing Paul wanted was for Titus or anyone in the church to do something that would bring shame upon the Gospel or disqualify Titus as a minister of the Gospel.

Titus was to encourage the younger generation of men to be self-controlled. The word translated as *encourage* in Titus 2:6 is translated as *preaching* in I Timothy 4:13. Many commentators believe that Titus was part of this generation. Lea and Griffin comment, “That Paul directed Titus to be an example to the young men strongly suggests that Titus himself was a young man.”²⁷ Paul encouraged Titus to teach and preach with “integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned.”²⁸ Within this new church on the island of Crete there were multiple generations of people, and the Apostle Paul gave Titus instructions regarding the teaching of the various generations.

This multigenerational picture of the early church is not only seen in Paul’s letter to Titus, but it is also evident in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. Like Titus, Timothy was a young pastor, but one of their differences was that Titus was the pastor of a new church on the island of Crete and Timothy was the pastor of the

²⁶ Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 139.

²⁷ Lea and Griffin, *1,2 Timothy Titus*, 304.

²⁸ Titus 2:7-8.

established church in Ephesus. Regardless of the age of the congregation, it is important to note that both churches consisted of multiple generations. Paul tells Timothy not to harshly rebuke an older man. Once again the term for an older man at least implies a man in his late fifties. Timothy is told to exhort him as if he were Timothy's father. Timothy was to treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers and younger women as sisters. Paul reminds Timothy that the church is the family of God. These words must have prompted Timothy to think of the fifth commandment, which states, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."²⁹ Even though Timothy had spiritual authority, he was to treat the older men with the highest level of respect. He was to honor the older women as he honored his mother Eunice. He was to never hold his authority over the heads of his peers. He was to treat younger men as brothers and treat the younger generation of women as sisters "with absolute purity."³⁰ As Paul warned Titus, he also warns Timothy to safeguard his ministry against any sexual temptation. The women of Timothy's generation were to be viewed as sisters in Christ who Jesus died to save.³¹ Paul's instructions to both Titus and Timothy reveal that the early church was comprised of people from multiple generations, but even those multiple generations do not rival the extensiveness of the generations of today.

So what does a multigenerational congregation in the 21st century look like? Who are the generations to which we speak? What are they like and how are they different? To this we turn our attention in the next chapter.

²⁹ Exodus 20:12.

³⁰ I Timothy 5:2.

³¹ William B. Barclay, *1 and 2 Timothy* (New York: Evangelical Press, 2005), 149-151.

CHAPTER THREE LITERATURE REVIEW

What does a multigenerational congregation in the 21st century look like? In this chapter we will evaluate the events that influenced each specific generation, articulate sermon characteristics that effectively connect with each generation, and learn how preachers can best speak God's truth to multiple generations.

In his book entitled *One Church, Four Generations*, Gary McIntosh identifies four generational waves in our American culture. Being fascinated with the ocean, McIntosh intentionally uses the terminology of waves. Just as waves crash into each other and have the potential of producing vicious riptides of undercurrent, so too generational waves collide causing potentially strong undercurrents of turbulence within both the American society and the American church. "That is why it is essential to understand each generational wave and how it affects the other waves to effectively serve God's purpose today."³² McIntosh identifies at least four generations within our culture. The Builder generation describes people born before 1946. Literally, this generation of individuals helped to build the American society in which we live. The people of this generation are highly respected for their work ethic and sense of sacrifice. The people born from 1947-1964 are called the Boomer generation. In the years that followed World War II, the birth rate boomed at an unprecedented rate. The Buster generation is the title given to the people born from 1965-1983. The population of this generation did not rival the numbers of the previous generation; therefore, some sociologists have called it a bust. The Bridger generation describes the generation of people who serves as a bridge between the 20th

³² Gary McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching all Ages in Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 24.

and 21st centuries. The Bridger generation consists of individuals born from 1984-2002.

Builder Generation

In America the Builder generation consists of approximately fifty-four million people. That is nineteen percent of the U.S. population.³³ The people of this generation were born before 1946. While McIntosh admits that some sociologists further divide this generation into three smaller subgroups – the G.I. generation (born before 1925 and fought in both World Wars), the Silent generation (born between 1926-1939), and the War Babies (born during World War II 1940-1945) – he argues that all three of these subgroups are strikingly similar in values and perceptions. He writes, “Generally speaking, when the pace of change is relatively slow, succeeding generations are alike. Since the pace of change was not as rapid in the first half of the twentieth century as it was in the second half, these subgroups tend to share many characteristics.”³⁴

This generation was influenced and shaped by the events of the Great War, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, and World War II. While it can be misleading to apply sweeping characteristics to a particular generation, there are certain attributes that many people of this generation consistently exhibit. Since America was largely an agrarian society in the first half of the twentieth century, the people of this generation learned the value of hard work. The scarcity of commodities during the Great Depression and the rationing of items during World War II prompted this generation to be frugal, to sacrifice for the sake of others, and to

³³ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

be financially conservative. Patriotism is a high priority to many Builders. They willingly and bravely fought for freedom, the advancement of democracy, and the protection of America. The formative events of the first half of the twentieth century galvanized within this generation a sense of loyalty and commitment to any cause deemed worthy.

This sense of loyalty and commitment among the people of this generation can be seen in their involvement within the institutional church. Denominational devotion is important, and for many Builders church attendance is used to evaluate a person's level of religious commitment. The Builders regularly give of their time, money, and energy to the local church. McIntosh writes that a common statement made by a person from this generation is, "Whenever the doors of the church were opened, we were there."³⁵

When it comes to preaching that connects with the Builder generation, McIntosh comments that vertical sermons are highly effective. He describes vertical sermons as preaching that stresses the exposition of the Bible, and it aims to touch the person's mind. Traditional messages, such as in-depth Bible studies or evangelistic sermons with a strong appeal for commitment, are preferable and effective with this generation. "Builders like to nod in agreement with the truth they already know. They love to hear the old, old story over and over."³⁶

In their book entitled *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church*, Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter agree with McIntosh as they describe the demeanor of the Builder generation as being marked by scarcity (due to their living

³⁵ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 91.

³⁶ Ibid., 204.

during the Great Depression) and sacrifice (due to their living during World War II). Whitesel and Hunter suggest that many Builders appreciate effort even more than the outcome in their worship service. A less than perfect singer can be praised simply because she gives her best effort. If that is true for the singer, then I suspect it could also be said of the preacher. Whitesel and Hunter conclude, “Thus, Builders often worship in an atmosphere that embraces an appreciation for the effort expended over the outcome experienced.”³⁷

Andrew Carl Wisdom reminds preachers in his book entitled *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly* that the Builder generation learns by linear propositions. The Builders have a can-do attitude, and they respond well to a challenge or call to repentance. They are linear thinkers by nature; therefore, they appreciate sermons with clear points that flow logically. Wisdom also adds that Builders demonstrate their faith through actions.³⁸

Boomer Generation

The largest generation in America is the Boomer generation (born 1946-1964). In the years that followed World War II, the birth rate dramatically increased across the nation. This generation consists of over seventy-four million people. It makes up more than twenty-six percent of the population.³⁹ The parents of this Boomer generation did not want their children to do without any of life’s amenities. They did not want their children to live as they had lived during the days of the Great

³⁷ Bob Whitesel and Kent Hunter, *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 169-170.

³⁸ Andrew Carl Wisdom, *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004), 52.

³⁹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 72.

Depression. Times were changing and America's economy following World War II was growing as fast as this new generation.

The formative experiences of the Boomers include tremendous economic, educational, and technological growth following World War II. While the Builders can remember life without television, the Boomers can not recall life without television. This generation was shaped by the events of the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boomers can recall with vivid clarity the events surrounding November 22, 1963 just as spontaneously as the Builder generation can dramatically remember the events of December 7, 1941. The former date marks the assassination of President Kennedy while the latter date marks the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese military signifying America's entrance into World War II. The demeanor of this generation was also shaped by the Vietnam War and Watergate.

The culmination of these events helped to forge this generation's personality. Because of the economic growth in America, many Boomers were able to attend college and receive higher education. The formative Boomer years were filled with various social causes and protests. Some Boomers marched for civil rights, protested America's involvement in Vietnam, and volunteered for the Peace Corp. While many Builders had an overall trust in authority, the Boomers developed a mistrust of the government, military, and many forms of authority.⁴⁰

In their book entitled *The Generation Driven Church: Evangelizing Boomers, Busters, and Millennials*, William and Le Etta Benke itemize a list of historical events that have been instrumental in the shaping of the Boomer generation. Events such as

⁴⁰ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 71-88.

the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and Watergate, brought widespread disillusionment to the Boomer generation concerning numerous sources of authority and much mistrust regarding the overwhelming modernist concepts that Boomer parents and grandparents had highly valued.⁴¹

According to McIntosh, the Boomer generation is the most studied generation in American history, and often times this generation is described as being rebellious, self-absorbed, affluent, and independent. McIntosh comments that this generation is open to the ministry of the local church. The people of this generation will not minister out of a sense of duty or obligation but they will do ministry that fits their interests and needs.⁴²

Benke claims that there are about seventy-six million Boomers in the United States, which constitutes 28% of the nation's population.⁴³ Benke also reports that about 60% of Boomers dropped out of church for a period of two years or more sometime during their adolescence or adulthood. While that statistic might not be too staggering, Benke continues by writing that almost all Boomers (90%) were raised in a religious tradition.⁴⁴

Benke characterizes the Boomer generation as having low loyalty toward institutions and denominational labels. Boomers maintain high expectations and have a sense of entitlement; therefore, ministries that flourish for Boomers are those that

⁴¹ William and Le Etta Benke, *The Generation Driven Church: Evangelizing Boomers, Busters, and Millennials* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2002), 21.

⁴² McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 93.

⁴³ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 39.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

provide high quality programs and facilities. The ministries that appeal to Boomers are pragmatic in their approach to Christianity.

According to Benke, Boomers look for churches that meet their needs as opposed to looking for places to serve. They do not come to church just for the sake of learning. They are looking for messages that are related to everyday life and have practical application for their life experiences. They are attracted to how-to sermons, and they desire to hear sermons that will help them break the destructive patterns of addiction and dysfunction that have dominated much of their lives.⁴⁵

According to McIntosh, the sermon that best connects with Boomers is one that conveys relevance and practicality to daily living. McIntosh claims that the message must be horizontal. Horizontal sermons “stress the practical application of the Bible and tend to be oriented to touching people’s hearts.”⁴⁶ Boomers want to hear practical preaching that will help them get through the week. They can appreciate the old, old story, but they want to be challenged with something they do not already know. They want to know how the truth of the Bible will improve their lives throughout the week. The preacher must diligently demonstrate the relevance of God’s word to this generation.

According to Whitesel and Hunter, the worship service that connects with Boomers is not measured by effort but professionalism. The service, programs, and facility have to be professionally run with high quality, up-to-date technology.

⁴⁵ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 41-51.

⁴⁶ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 204.

Boomers want sermons pertaining to the important issues of the day, and they want to receive guidance from the Bible on controversial topics.⁴⁷

Wisdom adds that Boomers are driven to excellence in all areas of life, and they expect the same even from their preacher. They are often drawn by professional programs for their children. According to Wisdom, Boomers most appreciate a preacher who is relationally warm and effective in his communication.⁴⁸

Buster Generation

The generation of people born between 1965 and 1983 is called the Buster generation. They represent sixty-six million Americans and equate to twenty-four percent of the population.⁴⁹ Part of the reason that the population of this generation does not rival the previous generation is because of the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in the infamous *Roe v. Wade* case. Even though the oldest Busters were only eight years old at the time of this decision, this court ruling had a major impact upon this generation not only numerically but also psychologically.

McIntosh reports that more than forty percent of Busters are children of divorce. This generation is twice as likely to come from broken homes as their parents and three times more likely than their grandparents.⁵⁰ This is the first generation where children were described as “latchkey kids.” In many cases either both parents worked outside the home building their careers, or the child was raised by a single parent who worked long hours out of necessity. Many busters came home from school to an empty house.

⁴⁷ Whitesel and Hunter, *A House Divided*, 170-171.

⁴⁸ Wisdom, *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*, 53.

⁴⁹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 122.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

Some of the formative events of this generation include the explosion of the Challenger shuttle on January 28, 1986, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the devastating effects of the sexual revolution, which resulted in the AIDS epidemic and other sexually transmitted diseases, the increased divorce rate, and the dilemmas such as world hunger, pollution, the national deficit, and homelessness. These events developed within the Busters a longing for true family relationships and a sense of belonging.

This generation has been taught by the society and the school system that there are no absolutes, morality is relative, and truth is subjective. McIntosh accurately observes, “An absence of good values, the frustration of isolation, and the emptiness of their lives are all leading many Busters on a spiritual search.”⁵¹ They have all the gadgets to make life easier but Busters have discovered that these technological inventions can still leave people isolated. McIntosh describes this generation as seekers who are looking for truth and they are very open to churches that will help them on their search for truth. Sermons that connect to this generation must be honest, straightforward, and direct. The length of the service and/or sermon does not matter as long as the content is real and not considered to be a waste of time. McIntosh suggests eliminating churchy language, avoiding Christian clichés, teaching that focuses on the basics of the Christian faith, offering illustrations about contemporary people, and proclaiming messages that focus on relationships, life’s purpose, or personal healing. Busters learn through experience and the use of visual

⁵¹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 139.

images. The preacher must use precise, practical terms of application. Do not assume that they know how to put the message into practice – tell them.⁵²

Benke describes the Buster generation as children of divorced and dysfunctional families. Benke writes, “They resent the wide disparity between themselves and the Boomer generation in terms of quality of childhood, educational and job opportunities, and the future outlook in terms of financial security and achieving the great American dream.”⁵³

The Buster generation is a spiritually sensitive generation of people who seek real relationships and the acceptance of a mutually caring community. The Boomer generation emphasizes excellence in program-oriented ministry while the Buster generation longs for realness in relationships. Busters want ministry and sermons that are real, relevant, and relational. The preacher plays an important role in establishing this relationship with his audience, which is a relationship that goes outside of the pulpit. Since Busters long for community and relationships, it is a requirement that preachers live their story with observable “authenticity, integrity, and humility.”⁵⁴ Benke comments that Busters do not often “respond to invitations after a stirring evangelistic message. They appear to need time to absorb the message and observe the reality as it is lived out in the lives of Christians close to them.”⁵⁵

Busters want to hear real-life examples where God has delivered people through difficult situations. Benke advocates the narrative approach as the most effective way to deliver a sermon to a Buster audience. This storytelling approach is

⁵² McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 138-156.

⁵³ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 62.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 74.

accepted because everyone has a story that is worth hearing and Busters understand that they can not argue with a person's story. Busters do not want to be told the truth, but they are willing to discover the truth together. Benke writes, "Sermons steeped in reasoned arguments do not resonate with Xers (Busters), but sermons take on meaning when packaged in a story context that conveys the same truth."⁵⁶

In his interview with Michael Duduit of *Preaching* magazine, George Barna comments that he has observed a growing openness to faith among Americans in general and within the Buster generation specifically. People are searching for something beyond themselves. They know that the answers to their questions can not be found in themselves, their careers, or materialism; therefore, people are seeking answers in the spiritual realm. Barna makes an important observation in this interview that has tremendous implications on preaching to Busters. He says:

The buster generation (those born since 1965) is a very spiritually intense generation. A major difference is that it is the first American generation – at least that I can tell – that has ever had a starting point for their spiritual journey that was not Christianity. In the past you started with Christianity, and you probably ended up there. And if you started there but it didn't work for you, at least you had that Christian experience. Now we increasingly see people under the age of thirty who started in other places – maybe with Eastern mysticism, maybe with the Muslim faith, maybe with Buddhism, or another faith system – and, if their systems don't work, then they may get around to Christianity. But it is no longer a given that one starts with Christianity and branches out.⁵⁷

Barna also comments that evangelistic communication with Busters is different than in previous generations. Busters do not overwhelmingly respond to an invitation at the conclusion of the service. In previous generations, the gospel could

⁵⁶ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 107.

⁵⁷ George Barna, "Boomers, Busters & Preaching: An Interview with George Barna," interview by Michael Duduit, *Preaching*, (September-October 1994), 7-8.

have been presented to a large crowd of people by a visiting evangelist, the people would have been given the opportunity to either accept or reject the message, and then the itinerant preacher would have moved to the next group of people. The challenge to this model of ministry is that Busters are relationship-oriented in their experience; therefore, it is more difficult for them to accept a message from a preacher who is here today but gone tomorrow. Barna describes the Buster generation as being a very discussion-oriented generation. He agrees that this generation places a high priority on relationships; therefore, it is imperative that the conversation of faith be ongoing.

When Barna was asked to compare and contrast the Boomers and Busters, he made strong statements, but unfortunately he did not adequately elaborate upon his comments. The following two quotes convey Barna's opinion but do not seem to be based upon much substantial statistical data. Even with little supportive material, his response bears repeating.

It would be very, very difficult for the same church to reach the Boomer and Buster. First of all, there is an animosity between the generations. Second, their styles of communication are different. Third, the ways in which they define success are different. Fourth their lifestyles are very different. I have looked at a lot of churches that claim they are reaching both generations and, frankly, when you come right down to it there are at best a handful of churches around the country that are doing it well. I think you almost have to develop independent congregations, which may be under the same umbrella. It may all be 'First Church,' but there is probably a congregation of boomers, a congregation of busters, a congregation of builders, and a congregation of seniors all under that umbrella.⁵⁸

In this interview, Duduit asked Barna to comment on the various communication styles of Boomers and Busters. He was asked the kind of advice he

⁵⁸ Barna, "Boomers, Busters & Preaching: An Interview with George Barna," 10.

gives to preachers trying to effectively minister in this multigenerational context.

Barna said:

Some of the fascinating churches I have visited that are trying to reach busters and are doing so well may have a thirty-minute sermon, which is broken into three segments during the course of the service. You have a ten-minute introduction to the topic, then you have an eight-minute video on that topic. Then the preacher comes back and preaches another ten minutes. Then you have a drama sketch for five to eight minutes, and the service is closed with ten minutes of preaching. That fits their communication style. It fits their attention span. It fits their style of thinking – the ‘mosaic’ style of thinking. For boomers it is: give me the problem, give me a solution. Busters are not assured that you are ever going to give them the solution. They are much happier with an open-ended sermon where you have raised the issue, where you have given them stuff to chew on, and then you give them opportunities through other forms of the ministry to come back and deal with it. But to stand there and say ‘here is the problem, here is the solution,’ doesn’t work very well with them...[Boomers] want references, almost a scholarly approach to what they are being given. But I would say the thing that both of these generations have in common has to do with what they see modeled in the life of the person who is teaching. They want somebody who is realistic, who is vulnerable, who is struggling, and who is saying ‘I have not mastered it, but this is where I am at this point in time and I think this is a useful strategy or perspective. I don’t have it totally together; grow with me.’⁵⁹

Whitesel and Hunter comment that for the Busters, the Builder service would look too antiquated and the Boomer service would appear too slick. The Buster generation prefers an interactive, fast-paced, multifaceted worship experience. Intimacy and interaction are high priorities for Busters and they appreciate the opportunity to break into small groups for prayer or discussion during the service. Buster sermons might include clips from a popular movie, a contemporary music video, or even a snippet from the nightly news.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Barna, “Boomers, Busters & Preaching: An Interview with George Barna,” 10-11.

⁶⁰ Whitesel and Hunter, *A House Divided*, 169-172.

Bridger Generation

The fourth generation is called the Bridger generation. This is the generation that was born between 1984 and 2002. They number approximately seventy-four million people and represent twenty-seven percent of the population in the United States.⁶¹ While it is difficult to itemize the particular events that have influenced this generation, the attacks on September 11, 2001 will forever be remembered by the Bridger generation. It will be to the Bridger generation what the assassination of John F. Kennedy was to the Boomers and the bombing of Pearl Harbor was for the Builders.

This generation is technologically advanced. They can not fathom life without computers, cell phones, the internet, and MTV. They are highly interactive and are capable of spontaneously clicking from one bit of information to another. It is not uncommon for a Bridger to use instant message, participate in a chat room with six of his friends, watch MTV videos through his computer, and work on a research paper using the Internet. In 1994 it was estimated that approximately 5.4 million people used the web. In 2001 that number had exploded to at least 50 million people.⁶²

This is a generation of postmodernism. It is tolerant of diversity and fragmented in its preferences. McIntosh describes the postmodern world as one where “value is placed on diversity, justice, and tolerance of multiple points of view. Truth is found by giving serious consideration to inclusive, interactive, complex

⁶¹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 162.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 175.

systems of thought.”⁶³ Postmodernism is both divergent and paradoxical. It is divergent in that a problem may have several correct or acceptable answers. It is paradoxical in that some of the acceptable answers are apparent contradictions.

Benke provides additional insight into the understanding of postmodernism. Postmodernism is a philosophy that all truth is subjective and relative to situations and circumstances. There is an adamant rejection of absolute truth. People who hold to postmodernism have concluded that neither “reason, science, nor divine revelation provides objective, absolute truth.”⁶⁴ According to postmodernism, all religions are equally valid as expressions of truth and reality, which demands not only diversity of belief but also unconditional tolerance of those beliefs. When people enter church with this philosophical backdrop, they do not recognize the Scripture as authoritative in their lives, and Christianity is viewed as one among many equally-valid religious concepts. All religious concepts have “something positive to offer but none [have] a monopoly on spiritual truth.”⁶⁵ This postmodern culture, which is by definition pluralistic, does not regard the Christian faith as the only way to truth but Christianity is perceived as one among many valid religions.⁶⁶

In his interview with Michael Duduit, George Barna succinctly captures the spirit of postmodernism when he says:

What used to take place did so because we were such a homogeneous population. You could throw out the shingle and let people know we were in business and pretty much everybody who lived in the community was similar in some key ways. You no longer have that luxury. Now if you’ve got 100,000 people who live in the

⁶³ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 165.

⁶⁴ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 26.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

community, you probably have 100,000 different lifestyles and value systems.⁶⁷

McIntosh claims that propositional truth will not engage this youngest generation. The key to communicating with the Bridger generation is to engage it with a compelling true story of faith. Effective communication with this generation will require acceptance on the part of the caring community. Most Bridgers are skeptical of almost everything; therefore, they desire to belong to a community before they give their lives to Christ. It is in the process of belonging that they come to a point of belief. The Bridger generation highly values genuine relationships. An authentic Christian life will speak more to the people of this generation than a traditional Bible study. The study of the Bible is important, but this generation will not sit through it unless a relationship already exists. If a real, genuine relationship already exists, then the people of this generation are much more willing to listen, accept, and embrace the truth being communicated to them. Authenticity is the benchmark of quality for the Bridger generation. Some of the best ways to effectively communicate with this generation is through storytelling, interactive learning, and apologetics.⁶⁸

Benke characterized this youngest generation as tolerant, diverse, relative, and resistant to absolutes. The big question on the minds of this generation that must be addressed by today's preacher is, "Why is Christianity the only way to God?"⁶⁹

Wisdom highlights the skepticism of both the Busters and the Bridgers when he describes these generations as constantly asking why they should believe the

⁶⁷ Barna, "Boomers, Busters & Preaching: An Interview with George Barna," 4-5.

⁶⁸ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 228.

⁶⁹ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 81-83.

claims of Christianity over the claims of another religion. Wisdom says that this youngest generation seeks a relevant message that addresses real everyday life. They are also nonlinear and they best receive the message through the use of practical images.⁷⁰

Communicating with Multiple Generations

Benke divides the church into two categories. Either a church is intentionally driven to reach the generations or it is not. The authors describe most churches as having a one-size-fits-all ministry approach. Many churches are Caretaker churches. While a Caretaker church might include a broad age range of participants, it is generally composed of people who have a church background and feel comfortable in a ministry setting that has been carried over for many years. The authors argue that very little evangelism takes place in these Caretaker churches because the ministries of these churches are primarily designed for those who are in church and not those who are outside the church.⁷¹

The authors conclude that the “preponderance of evidence, however, seems to indicate that generationally segmented worship may be the best strategy for reaching today’s unchurched masses.”⁷² The conclusion of the book contains five outreach models for Caretaker churches to implement in an effort to reach the unchurched Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers.

Whitesel and Hunter advocate forming a Tri-Generational church. They define a Tri-Generational church as “a holistic congregation with three distinct generational sub-congregations peacefully coexisting under one roof, one name, and

⁷⁰ Wisdom, *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*, 52-53.

⁷¹ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 6-7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 100.

one leadership core.”⁷³ They advocate the idea proposed by Barna that in order to most effectively communicate across generational lines there should be three groups under one umbrella of First Church.

Whitesel and Hunter argue that the primary reason why many churches are declining is because these churches are staffed, programmed, and designed to reach one generation. Whitesel and Hunter quote Margaret Mead who said, “The continuity of all cultures depends on the living presence of at least three generations.”⁷⁴

Whitesel and Hunter suggest holding a unity celebration once a quarter or twice a year. This unity celebration would unite the entire tri-generational church. During this service the best of each generation would be on display. The authors gave comments on utilizing generational music, testimonies, and dramas, but nothing was said regarding preaching. The most helpful suggestion from this book regarding preaching to various generations was offered in their discussion on application. They wrote, “If a pastor were delivering a sermon to these three groups simultaneously, the sermon might have to have three separate applications to meet the different needs or aspirations of each generation.”⁷⁵

Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof co-authored the book entitled *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations*. In this book, Carroll and Roof identify three generational cultures, which they label Pre-boomers, Boomers, and Xers. They write, “Each successive generation in America develops to a greater or lesser extent its own distinctive personality and thereby reshapes the nation and its future. Religion is very much bound up with a people’s mood, values,

⁷³ Whitesel and Hunter, *A House Divided*, 28.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

and emotions.”⁷⁶ They, like McIntosh and Benke, identify some of the same historical events that have helped to shape the outlook of each generation. Carroll and Roof draw their conclusions from statistical data gathered from two distinct regions in America. They studied nineteen churches and two campus ministries. These twenty-one ministry sites were located in North Carolina and California. They conducted telephone surveys with a sample population of those two areas including both church members and non-church members. They conducted more than two hundred interviews with congregational leaders and church members, and they also administered a questionnaire to church members.

From their evaluation of the data, Carroll and Roof divide churches into one of three groupings. One grouping is classified as “inherited model.” This model maintains the programs and church practices from the past. While many of these congregations are intergenerational in population, the leadership does very little to change existing programs and ministries to meet the needs of a changing culture. There is an intentional philosophy to do what has been done in the past. The second set of congregations is entitled “blended or mixed model.” This model makes a conscience effort to appeal to the various generations in the congregation. This intentional effort to cross generational boundaries does not come without some level of church conflict and tension. The third grouping of churches is the “generation-specific” model. This congregation targets a specific generation. While multiple generations might be present within this model, the generation-specific model programs the church ministries and services to focus intently upon reaching one

⁷⁶ Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 62.

generation. While in practice the inherited model predominantly reaches one generation, the intention of that model is different than the intentional purpose of the generation-specific model. The inherited model simply does what it has always done while the generation-specific model strategically changes and adapts to reach one particular generation.⁷⁷

While this book provides fascinating insights into the various generations, not much is given in the area of preaching to the multiple generations that proves to be helpful. The first half of the book describes the three generations and reports the findings of the telephone surveys among the residents of North Carolina and California. In the second half of the book, Carroll and Roof offer several detailed examples of each church grouping.

The hypothesis of Wisdom's book was encouraging to discover. Wisdom argues that a preacher can "preach to all generations in the same setting by invoking generation-specific references."⁷⁸ Wisdom writes, "Scripture cannot come alive as a living force if the exegesis of the biblical word is not brought in creative tension with an exegesis of the everyday world of one's parishioners."⁷⁹ Boredom occurs in the pew when there is a lack of connection between the Word being preach and the lives being lived by the listeners. Wisdom advocates being generationally specific in your language. Using the language of several generations helps to connect with multiple generations. Wisdom encourages being specific and contemporary in the use of language. One of the worst mistakes preachers can make is to attempt to "preach

⁷⁷ Carroll and Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds*, 105-107.

⁷⁸ Wisdom, *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*, 82.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

broadly to the middle of the congregation and hope it will land on as many as possible.”⁸⁰

Preachers cannot ignore generational differences nor can the various generational needs be blurred on Sunday morning. Wisdom compares many cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all sermonic approaches to Henry Ford’s mass-marketed Model T slogan. It was Henry Ford who said, “They can have any color they want as long as it’s black.”⁸¹ Many preachers get stuck in that same one-size-fits-all approach to sermon making.

Wisdom likens intergenerational preaching to a “sacred dance.” He writes, “The challenge of communicating through culture, language, and meaning can be likened to learning the necessary steps to engage in that dance respectfully and competently.”⁸² The preacher has to learn the language of the generation. He compares this task to the work of Martin Luther who transformed contemporary drinking songs into popular religious hymns by using the German vernacular of the Scripture.

In his book, Wisdom used three preaching sites and incorporated the use of focus groups to help survey the congregations after hearing a particular sermon. He wanted to see what language, image, or visual resonated with each generation. He layered his sermons with multiple word pictures and images. For example at one juncture of the sermon as he spoke of the rigors of discipleship, Wisdom said that it was “not a walk in the park” and he immediately followed it with “not a skip through

⁸⁰ Wisdom, *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*, 14.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 20.

cyberspace.”⁸³ This was done in an attempt to connect with the older generation as well as the younger generations. Wisdom writes, “The paramount concern for intergenerational preaching is to be sure to proclaim God’s Word in metaphorical images that include and engage all generations.”⁸⁴

Preachers must use their language carefully and clearly in the exposition, illustrations, and application of the sermon. Preachers must speak specifically to everyone. This type of intentional preaching requires, “solid exegesis, thorough congregational analysis and an educated, ongoing awareness of generation-specific symbols.”⁸⁵ Wisdom accurately writes that most preachers learn the proper tools of exegesis in seminary, but very little is taught regarding congregational analysis as it pertains to generational differences. Wisdom offers the following suggestions to help preachers connect with the various generations.

- Develop a Four-step Intergenerational Chart
 1. Divide the congregation by generations showing the percentage of the congregation in each generation
 2. Chart your findings for use during sermon preparation
 3. Add three Catholic generational cohorts to the chart (Wisdom used Pre-Vatican I, Vatican II, and Post-Vatican II, but for our use Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers could be used).
 4. Make a final column to place specific language, images, or hub symbols for each generation for a given sermon.
- Build a Generational Lexicon – make a glossary of terms that are routinely used by different generations.
- Organize a Generational Preacher’s Notebook – collect articles, concepts, behaviors from magazines, movies, internet, etc to keep up to date with generational trends in our culture.
- Develop generational profiles – keep up to date profiles of the makeup of the congregation where you preach.⁸⁶

⁸³ Wisdom, *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*, 87.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 99-101.

In his book entitled *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* Roger E. Van Harn shrinks the gap between the pulpit and the pew. He writes, “The minister is not called first of all to be creative; he or she is called to be a faithful listener so that others can hear the Word of God.”⁸⁷ Van Harn begins by reminding the preacher that before the Word of God can be heard by the congregation it must be accurately heard and applied to the preacher. Van Harn quotes Merrill Abbey who comments on the importance of listening before speaking when he writes:

Before we are interpreters of the Word, we are sinful men who stand in desperate need to hear it. On our hearing hangs our own salvation. But we are charged with the pastoral care of God’s people, and our hearing of their need is crucial to that ministry. Nor can we interpret a Word we have not first attentively heard; it is our occupational hazard that we are speaking men and may be so driven by the question, ‘What shall I say?’ that we find little time to ask, ‘What is God saying?’⁸⁸

It is imperative that preachers not only listen to the Word of God and apply it to themselves but preachers must also listen to the congregation to which they speak. If preachers do not know to whom they are speaking then it will be extremely challenging to connect with the members of the congregation at a meaningful level. Van Harn provides two quotes that are helpful to the preacher who is attempting to connect with a multigenerational audience. The first quote is from Thomas Long who advocates visualizing the listeners even during the sermon preparation. Long writes:

It is not enough, though, to go to the Bible only with our own lives in view. We must self-consciously embody the needs and situations of others, especially those who are different from ourselves. Some preachers find it helpful, as part of the process of interpreting the scripture, to visualize the congregation that will be present when the sermon is preached. They survey the congregation in their mind’s eye, seeing there the familiar faces and the lives behind them. They see the

⁸⁷ Roger E. Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 19.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

adults and the children, the families and those who are single, those who participate actively in the church's mission and those who stand cautiously on the edges of the church's life. They see those for whom life is full and good and those for whom life is composed of jagged pieces. They see the regulars sitting in their customary places, and they see the stranger, the newcomer, the visitor, hesitating and wondering if there is a place for them. They see the people who are there, and they see the people who cannot be there, or who choose not to be there. When preachers turn to the scripture, all these people go with them. Other preachers invite members of the congregation actually to participate with them in exploring the biblical text, gathering a small group early in the sermon development process to listen to the text, to study it together, to raise questions about it, and to name the concerns it evokes.⁸⁹

As people listen to the sermon, they bring with them a mixed bag of emotions and needs. There are needs that they wish to hide, other needs that need to be met, and still additional needs that are not even known. The needs that are carried to the pew are wrapped up in the events of daily life. These are the needs that are brought to the preaching moment, and the wise preacher knows, understands, and speaks to the needs of the people. Van Harn's second quotation comes from Lewis Smedes, who one day looked around at the congregation and saw numerous people of every age carrying various needs that had to be addressed. Smedes wrote:

A man and woman, sitting board-straight, smiling on cue at every piece of funny piety, are hating each other for letting romance in their marriage collapse on a tiring treadmill of tasteless, but always tidy tedium.

A widow, whispering her Amens to every promise of divine providence, is frightened to death because the unkillable beast of inflation is devouring her savings.

A father, the congregational model of parental firmness, is fuming in the suspicion of his own fatherly failure because he cannot stomach, much less understand, the furious antics of a slightly crazy son.

An attractive young woman in the front pew is absolutely paralyzed, sure she has breast cancer.

⁸⁹ Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 56.

A middle-aged fellow who, with his new Mercedes, is an obvious Christian success story, is wondering when he will ever have the guts to tell his boss to take his lousy job and shove it.

A submissive wife of one of the elders is terrified because she is being pushed to face up to her closet alcoholism.

Ordinary people, all of them, and there are a lot more where they came from.⁹⁰

These are the people who make up a multigenerational congregation. These are the needs of their everyday lives. As the preacher visualizes these specific people with their individualized needs, the truth of the passage begins to take shape in the mind of the preacher and can then be directly and specifically applied to the listener.

Specific application of biblical truth is crucial for the sermon to connect with a multigenerational audience. Van Harn cites Donald Miller who compares preaching to shooting quail. Miller says, “If you aim for all the birds, you hit none, but if you aim for one, you are likely to get several.” Van Harn quickly adds that aiming at specific needs does not begin while the preacher is standing in the pulpit. Van Harn writes, “It begins when the preachers listen to the listeners who have called them to listen with them for the Word of God.”⁹¹

One of the primary ways Van Harn suggests for preachers to listen to the listeners is by enlisting up to four congregation members to keep a diary for up to four weeks at a time. Throughout the weekdays each participant is to describe something of importance that occurred in his or her life that day. It can be an event, experience, thought, fear, need, question, or doubt. Then each participant is to record specific words of faith that were important to him or her that day. These words could come from the Bible, a song, a creed, a book, or another person. On the page of the

⁹⁰ Lewis Smedes, “Preaching to Ordinary People,” *Leadership* 4, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 116.

⁹¹ Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*, 137.

diary reserved for Sunday, the listener is asked to complete four statements related to the sermon.

1. The sermon was about...
2. The sermon enabled me to believe that...
3. The sermon asked that I...
4. The sermon made me feel...

Each week the listeners are to turn in their diaries to the pastor realizing that every response is kept in confidence. At the end of the process the participants meet with the pastor to discuss the experience. This entire process is an attempt to help the preacher listen to the listener.⁹²

In his book entitled *Preaching to a TV Generation*, Michael Rogness has little to say about connecting with multiple generations, but as he describes his explanation of sermon preparation and delivery, he asks an important question. Rogness writes, “The concern of this book is: How has television affected the way people listen to and apprehend the spoken word, and how should we preachers respond?”⁹³ Television is a visual medium where a thirty-second commercial throws approximately fifty images at the audience. Politicians have learned how to utilize a thirty-second spot on television to swing the opinion of voters and in national presidential debates the candidates present their economic policy or foreign policy in three-minute segments.⁹⁴ The result is that audiences have developed a shorter listening span, and they are much quicker to tune out the preacher than to patiently listen to him.

Rogness identifies five characteristics for the television-saturated audience. Each characteristic directly impacts preaching. First, the television conveys pictures

⁹² Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*, 138-139.

⁹³ Michael Rogness, *Preaching to a TV Generation: The Sermon in the Electronic Age* (Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing Company, 1994), 13.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

and not concepts. The television does not transmit a logically developed argument of linear thought to the audience but the transmission of information primarily occurs through the television by way of visual images. The contemporary preacher must communicate with his audience by helping it to paint visual pictures in its mind so that it not only hears the sermon but it also sees the sermon.

Second, information is conveyed through the television in bytes or impressions and not in a sequential manner. The automobile industry understands that the television audience can not comprehend within thirty seconds the specifics of the product such as the horsepower, the consumer reports, the engine specifications, and the details of the bumper-to-bumper warranty. The goal of the automobile company is not to merely educate the audience on the specifics of the particular vehicle but rather the company's goal is to leave the impression that the consumer wants and needs this automobile. The preacher must communicate the sermon content in memorable bytes leaving the impression that the listener needs and wants the message that is being communicated.

Third, the television audience has a shorter concentration span. The television producers give the audience a break every 10-12 minutes. Since many people in the congregation can not remember life without television, much of the preacher's audience is accustomed to listening for no more than ten minutes at a time. It would have been helpful if the author had offered specific suggestions for the preacher to reset the attention span of the audience.

The fourth characteristic of a television-saturated audience is that the congregation listens more passively. People do multiple tasks while watching

television. Individuals become easily distracted. If the content of the television broadcast is not interesting, then people will do something else or turn the channel. Congregation members do the same thing mentally each week as they listen to the sermon. If the content is not captivating, then listeners will wander in their thoughts, settle in for a nap, text message a friend, or even read the backside of the bulletin. They listen with a remote control in their heads. If the sermon does not connect, then they will click to something more interesting. Rogness suggests the use of a story, illustration, voice inflection, or a dramatic turn in the flow of the sermon as possible ways to recapture a congregation that is passively listening to the message.

The fifth characteristic of television described by Rogness is the observation that television is a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication. The printed page usually does not convey the speaker's looks, demeanor, voice inflection, facial gesture, or eye contact. But the spoken word through television and preaching conveys all of that and much more. The speaker's non-verbal communication influences the level of credibility that the listener will give to the spokesman on the commercial, the actress on the show, or the preacher on the platform.⁹⁵

It is beneficial for the preacher to see his preaching through the eyes, minds, and ears of the listeners. It was Donald Macleod who said:

Before the preacher every Sunday morning are several hundred wandering minds with diverse and fleeting foci...Remember their attention response and span are influenced and determined by watching and hearing six weekdays of television commercials...More often than not they sit back in the pews, fold their spiritual arms, and say within themselves, "Well, what have you got to say this morning that will interest me?"⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Rogness, *Preaching to a TV Generation*, 24-30.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

Rogness offers at least four helpful insights for the contemporary preacher.

First, the preacher ought to speak with images. He writes, “It is the difference between explaining something abstractly or saying the same thing in language which will produce a vivid picture in the listener’s mind.”⁹⁷ He gives an example of this principle from a colleague’s sermon from the New Testament story of Peter walking on the water toward Jesus. The application of this scenario could be explained to the audience in simple prose by saying, “We also can be distracted by the anxieties and worries surrounding us, taking our attention away from Jesus.” But instead the preacher used vivid imagery to help the congregation see and not merely hear the text. The preacher said, “A lot of us are sopping wet up to our knees. Others are soaking wet up to the belt line, even the shoulders. And some of us are barely holding our heads above water, wondering if we’ll make it at all!”⁹⁸

Second, the preacher should drive home one point in a sermon. Rogness advocates that the preacher be able to summarize the sermon’s main point in one or two sentences. While Rogness does not cite Haddon Robinson, it sounds as if his thoughts have been influenced by Robinson’s Big Idea approach to preaching as detailed in his book entitled *Biblical Preaching*.

The idea that the preacher needs a succinct statement of the sermon’s main point to promote homiletical unity is elsewhere described by Bryan Chapell as the 3 A.M. Test. Chapel writes that if a preacher is awakened from a deep sleep at three o’clock in the morning and asked to give the sermon’s main idea, the preacher should be able to give a crisp answer. Chapell writes, “Thoughts you cannot gather at 3

⁹⁷ Rogness, *Preaching to a TV Generation*, 42.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

A.M. are not likely to be caught by others at 11 A.M.”⁹⁹ The necessity of driving home one sermon idea is poetically described by Charles Haddon Spurgeon who said, “One tenpenny nail driven home and clenched will be more useful than a score of tin-tacks loosely fixed, to be pulled out again in an hour.”¹⁰⁰

Third, the sermon should be constructed to maintain tension throughout the message. The moment a preacher becomes predictable, the attention of the audience begins to drift. Each sermon should be structured to maintain tension. A good sermon identifies a problem and throughout the message the preacher wrestles with that problem alongside the audience. Curiosity will keep the attention of the audience but once the tension is gone so is the attention of the audience.¹⁰¹

Fourth, using creative preaching styles provides some change that attracts attention. Rogness suggests the use of narrative preaching, the use of visual aids, drama, and the use of more than one preacher through interviews, dialogue, or audience participation.¹⁰²

In his book entitled *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World*, David Henderson offers helpful insights and advice regarding preaching to a changing culture. He does not say much about multigenerational preaching, but he has much to say about addressing our contemporary culture. He encourages every preacher to maintain a proper balance between biblical authority and audience sensitivity. It is a mistake to emphasize one characteristic to the neglect of the other characteristic. Henderson writes, “We need to allow the Bible, in its

⁹⁹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 39.

¹⁰⁰ Rogness, *Preaching to a TV Generation*, 53.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 63-66.

¹⁰² Ibid., 79-90.

entirety, to provide the direction and substance of our message. At the same time, we need to speak in such a way that the Bible's message is brought to bear on the needs and circumstances of our hearers in language they understand."¹⁰³ The sermon must maintain this tension of biblical authority and audience sensitivity. The sermon that becomes audience-driven allows the desires of the audience to eclipse the message. The authority of an audience-driven sermon begins and ends with the audience.

Henderson also reminds the preacher that the biblical authority of the sermon should not eclipse the preacher's sensitivity to the audience. If the sermon is preached with no regard for the cultural experiences of the audience, then even the finest explanation of a biblical text will not be heard by the listeners. Henderson appropriately says, "It is not our place to make the Bible relevant, but it is unquestionably our place to communicate the relevance of the Bible. Only then is it really heard. And isn't that what we are about every time we preach or teach or share the faith?"¹⁰⁴

The preacher not only speaks biblical truth but the preacher speaks the biblical truth in light of the life experiences of the listener. The author writes, "If we talk to secular people about the Bible, we lose them. If we talk to them about themselves from the pages of the Bible, we grab them."¹⁰⁵

One of the most helpful books in this thesis-project process is a book that contains very little about multigenerational preaching but it has everything to do with helping the preacher connect with the contemporary audience. In their book entitled

¹⁰³ David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 34.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 140.

Preaching that Connects: Using Journalistic Techniques to Add Impact, Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson apply numerous journalistic principles to preaching. Every journalist is presented with the task of connecting with his audience every time he writes a story and the preacher faces the same dilemma every time he crafts and delivers a sermon. In most cases, the writing content of the journalist and the preacher is quite different but the structure, principles, and process of writing something worth reading or listening to is strikingly similar. While all of these principles are insightful, there are five journalistic techniques that seem to be most helpful.

The first journalistic principle is that the introduction must arrest the attention of the audience. The introduction must grab both the head and the heart of the listener. If the opening sentence aims at the head of the listener, then the development of the introduction must address the listener's heart. The authors write, "Fail here and we imply that we will be talking about a subject rather than speaking to living, breathing, feeling, needy people. Succeed here, and people will be unable to pull away from the sermon."¹⁰⁶ A classic example of an introduction that connects with both the head and the heart comes from a sermon delivered by Bruce Thielemann. The illustration is lengthy but it not only depicts this first principle but it also connects beautifully with a cross-section of a multigenerational congregation.

It was on the wall of a subway in New York City. There was an advertising poster which depicted a dignified older gentleman recommending a particular product. And someone, probably a little boy, wanted to deface the advertisement, so he drew a balloon coming out of the mouth of this dignified older gentleman, and then this youngster wrote in the balloon the dirtiest thing he could think of. He

¹⁰⁶ Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson, *Preaching That Connects: Using Journalistic Techniques to Add Impact* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 38.

wrote, “I like __,” and he meant to write “girls,” only he made a mistake, and instead of writing “girls,” he wrote “grils.” “I like grils.”

Then someone had come along and with a felt-tipped pen had written under that, “It’s ‘girls,’ stupid, not ‘grils.’”

Then another party, for the handwriting was still different, had come and written under that, “But then what about us grils?”

Now what about us grils? What about the people that nobody seems to like? What about the people who feel they’ve been crowded out of the middle of life, shoved aside, pushed somewhere they don’t want to be? What about us grils?

A young man sat in my apartment about three weeks ago and with tears rolling down his face told me that the other kids thought he was weird. They oft-times isolated him. He told me in so many words he was a gril. Well, this sermon is dedicated to him.

A girl in her middle twenties said to me some months ago that she wanted to get into the middle of the garden of life. She wanted to be the kind of flower that people sometimes saw and noticed and appreciated. She was saying to me, in so many words, “I’m tired of being a gril.” And this sermon is my response to her.

I know an older gentleman who deeply loved his wife and lost her to death. They were a beautiful couple in every way that you might choose to describe people. When she was gone, he said to me with tears (grils cry a lot), “Life seems to be passing me by. It’s rushing on all the time, and I don’t seem to be able to get on to it anymore. I’m on the outside looking in, and it makes me desperately lonely.” He was saying to me in so many words that he feels like a gril.

Then there’s the person who’s isolated because he’s fat. They know people look at their fat and think about their fat. There are people who are homely. There are people who have never been taught the social graces. They feel awkward, as if they have three legs or four eyes. It’s not a nice way to feel. It’s like dying over a long, long time. It’s hard being a gril.¹⁰⁷

When Bruce Thielemann announced that he was going to talk about the gril named Zacchaeus, anyone who has ever felt like a gril, which probably included everyone in the audience, was arrested and ready to listen. The introduction must grab both the head and the heart of the listener. This is a good example of layering multiple illustrations, which are specifically applied to various generations within the audience.

¹⁰⁷ Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 40-41.

The second journalistic technique conveys the necessity to illustrate more than explain. Galli and Larson are in agreement with Michael Rogness when they write, “We live in a visual, image-saturated culture. The more mental pictures we use, the more memorable, evocative, and understandable will be our sermons.”¹⁰⁸ The key to the illustration is to be as specific as possible in the description. The difference between specific and vague is many times the difference between being interesting and boring. To say that Americans are obsessed with materialism is vague, but it could be stated more specifically by saying, “Americans pant for wide-screen color televisions, Sony CD players, ski trips to Vale, and hot-red Miatas.”¹⁰⁹ Earlier in the book Galli and Larson write:

Being specific means saying *Luger*, rather than *weapon*; '89 *Taurus*, rather than *vehicle*; *adultery*, rather than *sin*; *the nails through Christ's palms*, rather than *Christ's sufferings*; *Bob, the 45-year-old, overweight Chicago detective with the scar on the back of his hand*, rather than *the officer*. The gunpowder is in specifics, the more precise the better.¹¹⁰

The third journalistic principle that the preacher ought to employ is the necessity to put a face on the story. People like illustrations about other people. Illustrations can come from mathematics and mechanics, but stories about real people with real struggles, failures, and victories are more likely to stir the emotion within the audience. Galli and Larson write that one television journalist associated with the show *60 Minutes* said, “The producers never do a story about an issue unless they can find a person to tie that issue to.”¹¹¹ They went on to give the example that the producers would not merely do a story on the destruction of the rain forests, but they

¹⁰⁸ Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 65-66.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

would do a story reporting an individual's fight against deforestation. People are curious about other people. This goes right along with many of the previous authors who claim that younger generations are much more willing to listen to a story of faith than a linear proposition of faith. The preacher should tie the biblical truth to a real person. A lived faith is always more convincing and intriguing than a theorized faith.

The fourth technique that the preacher shares with the journalist is the need to show rather than tell. Instead of the preacher standing between the listener and the story telling them the events of the scene, what to think, or how to respond, the preacher can show the listeners what happened thereby allowing them to learn for themselves. This approach fits well into the Buster and Bridger mindset. They typically do not want to be told the truth but they want to experience and discover the truth together. Galli and Larson give a simple example of showing versus telling when they write, "'Johnny was mad' is telling; 'Johnny turned red, clenched his teeth, and pounded his fist on the table' is showing."¹¹² Another example of this technique is saying, "David strained to raise Goliath's sword over his head" instead of merely saying "Goliath's sword was heavy."¹¹³ The difference can be subtle yet profoundly effective. It is imperative that we tell the story in ways that are fresh and visible. The authors write, "When we taste, touch, smell, observe, and listen, we tell the story freshly even to those who have heard the story ninety-nine times before."¹¹⁴

The fifth journalistic principle involves being extremely strategic in word selection. This principle may be overtly obvious since preachers use words to convey their message but it can not be overstated. Galli and Larson emphasize the omission

¹¹² Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 76.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

of needless words, the use of active words, grammar construction that relays action, the need to be concise, specific, and clear. They write, “The more we like sentences, like to craft them, play with them for best effect, the more our people will like our preaching.”¹¹⁵ To be meticulous in word selection does not imply that these authors advocate preaching with the use of manuscripts because elsewhere they comment that whenever eye contact is broken the mood vanishes. The delivery must be conversational, and the preacher must use few notes or preferably no notes in the delivery of the sermon. This requires more preparation, but it is preparation that is well worth the time invested.

Plain words create plain sermons while artistic words help to create interesting sermons. The use of rhetorical devices such as metaphors, similes, parallelism, repetition, refrain, rhyme and alliteration can all be used to add an artistic flavor to the sermon.

The implementation of these journalistic techniques will help the preacher to connect with the listener of any generation. Every listener will appreciate a sermon that arrests his/her attention, illustrates the truth clearly, provides examples of real people, demonstrates rather than explain, and is diligent in word selection.

This chapter described the various generations that make up a multigenerational congregation in the 21st century. The events that influenced each specific generation were described. Various sermon characteristics that effectively connect with each generation were articulated as described by various authors. Numerous authors gave multiple suggestions telling how to most effectively communicate with the various generations.

¹¹⁵ Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 92.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEMINAR ON MULTIGENERATIONAL PREACHING

Title: Communication that Connects: Preaching to a Multigenerational Audience

Outcome: In this seminar, preachers will learn to connect their sermons to the multiple generations of listeners within the congregation.

Goal #1: Preachers will identify four generations of people within the congregation.

Objective 1: Preachers will describe the historical events that influenced each generation.

Objective 2: Preachers will describe how each generation listens to sermons.

Goal #2: Preachers will explain four ways to connect their sermons to the life experiences of the multigenerational listeners.

Objective 1: Preachers will layer sermonic illustrations and applications broadly yet specifically.

Objective 2: Preachers will visualize the audience while in sermon preparation.

Objective 3: Preachers will describe ways to listen to their listeners.

Objective 4: Preachers will outline five journalistic principles that can be utilized in sermon preparation and delivery.

Session #1

The Generational Divide

The outcome of Session #1 will be the completion of Goal #1. At the conclusion of this session preachers will be able to identify the four generations of people within the congregation by knowing the historical events that helped to influence each generation and by describing various ways each generation listens to sermons.

Derrick has been preaching for nearly twenty-seven years. During that time he has been the pastor of three churches, and in all three of his ministry settings he has made preaching a top priority. Derrick has always worked hard in his sermon preparation, because he's committed to clarity in exposition and accuracy in life application. In seminary, he was awarded the "Most Outstanding Preacher" in his graduating class more than a quarter of a century ago. Throughout the ministry, people have made numerous, positive comments on his preaching ability, but he would be the first to tell you that preaching isn't what it used to be. There was a time

when Derrick could stand and proclaim “Thus says the LORD,” and the people eagerly awaited God’s message from God’s messenger. Now Derrick has discovered that capturing and maintaining the people’s attention is a routine struggle. There was a time when Derrick could say to the congregation, “Now you remember the story,” but now it has become abundantly clear that the congregation doesn’t know the biblical story he wants them to recall. There was a time when the majority of listeners in his congregation were similar in their thoughts, beliefs, worldview, and language, but recently Derrick has discovered that the various generations resemble completely different cultures. The generations of people that stare back at him each Sunday morning vary immensely in their understanding of truth, their beliefs about God, and their value systems. Derrick finds himself at the end of his weekly sermon preparation asking the question, “How can I ensure that my sermon connects with the ninety-two year old World War II veteran, the forty-six year old woman who has recently gone through a devastating divorce, and the sixteen year old teenager who is struggling with an identity crisis?” He wonders how he can say anything simultaneously relevant to the eight year boy and the eighty-eight year old widow. Derrick has read that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, but he is beginning to believe the elderly are from Mercury and those teenagers are from Pluto. It seems to him that the generation gap is as broad as the Grand Canyon and as deep as the Atlantic Ocean. Honestly, there are times when the generational diversity in his church seems insurmountable. Many Sunday mornings Derrick sits in his study thinking to himself, “Preaching sure isn’t as easy as it used to be.”

If this scenario describes your ministry setting, don't despair. You are not alone. There are countless preachers like Derrick across America. While it is true that effectively speaking to multiple generations is challenging, I want you to know today that it is not impossible. The outcome of this two-session seminar is that you will learn to connect your sermons to the various generations of listeners in your congregation.

In his book entitled *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World*, David Henderson encourages every preacher to maintain a proper balance between biblical authority and audience sensitivity. Henderson writes, "We need to allow the Bible, in its entirety, to provide the direction and substance of our message. At the same time, we need to speak in such a way that the Bible's message is brought to bear on the needs and circumstances of our hearers in language they understand."¹¹⁶ The sermon must maintain a certain tension between biblical authority and audience sensitivity. The preacher who emphasizes biblical authority to the neglect of audience sensitivity may craft the finest exegetical explanation of a given passage, but if it is not communicated in a manner that is sensitive to the life experiences of the audience, then the message falls on deaf ears. On the other hand, the preacher who allows his sermon to become audience-driven to the neglect of any biblical authority connects beautifully with his congregation, but without the authority of the Scripture he truly has nothing life-changing to say to the people. Henderson appropriately writes, "It is not our place to make the Bible relevant, but it is unquestionably our place to communicate the relevance of the Bible."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Henderson, *Culture Shift*, 34.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

The preacher does not merely speak biblical truth, but the preacher speaks the biblical truth in light of the listeners' life experiences. Henderson writes, "If we talk to secular people about the Bible, we lose them. If we talk to them about themselves from the pages of the Bible, we grab them."¹¹⁸

Biblical Foundation for Multigenerational Preaching

One of the tremendous challenges of this seminar is the apparent lack of a biblical mandate to preach to multiple generations simultaneously. There is no eleventh commandment declaring that we must preach to all the generations at once. There are numerous references throughout the Scripture imploring one generation to proclaim the works of the Lord to the next generation. An example of this is given in Psalm 78:4 where Asaph writes, "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done." While much is said in the Scripture of a trans-generational call to convey God's truth to the next generation, very little is written about the teaching of the Scripture to multiple generations simultaneously.

The challenge today of preaching to multiple generations represents a modern day phenomenon that was not obvious to the biblical authors of antiquity. However, what is clear is that the Bible consistently demonstrates God's concern for people of every age. God continually shows that the Bible can be understood by both young children and grown adults.¹¹⁹

The Bible does contain examples of multigenerational church life. The clearest biblical picture of a multigenerational congregation is described in the

¹¹⁸ Henderson, *Culture Shift*, 140.

¹¹⁹ The second chapter of this thesis-project contains a detailed description of many biblical passages that address this issue.

Pastoral Epistles. In these letters Paul instructs both Titus and Timothy about how they should teach the multiple generations.

After Paul and Titus had evangelized the island of Crete, Titus stayed on that Mediterranean island with instructions to start a church. The people of Crete were known for their lying, laziness, and gluttony.¹²⁰ With those characteristics as the moral backdrop of that society, Paul instructed his son in the ministry to appoint elders, teach the faith with integrity, and be an example that would affect the life of outsiders. At the beginning of chapter two Paul writes, “But you must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.”¹²¹ Literally, Paul tells the young preacher to “speak teaching that is fitting and healthy.” This teaching is directed to people of various ages. Paul gives instructions regarding the older men, older women, younger women, and younger men.¹²² According to Gordon Fee, Hippocrates understood the term translated as “older man” to refer to the sixth of seven periods of a man’s life, which would be equivalent of fifty to fifty-six years of age. Philo used this word to describe a man over sixty years of age. Fee argues that it would have been from this group of “older men” that Titus would have selected and appointed elders for the church.¹²³

Titus was instructed to teach the older generations of men and women. Paul gave instructions that the older women were to train the younger women. The Greek word for *train* literally means to bring someone to his senses and to encourage, advise, or urge an individual. In all likelihood, Paul gave these instructions for the older women to train the younger women as a safeguard for his young son in the

¹²⁰ Titus 1:12-13.

¹²¹ Titus 2:1.

¹²² Titus 2:2-8.

¹²³ Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 139.

ministry. The last thing Paul wanted was for Titus or anyone in the church to do something that would bring shame upon the Gospel or disqualify Titus as a minister of the Gospel.

Titus was to encourage the younger generation of men to be self-controlled. The word translated as *encourage* in Titus 2:6 is also translated as *preaching* in I Timothy 4:13. Paul encouraged Titus to teach and preach with “integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned.”¹²⁴ Within this new church on the island of Crete there were multiple generations of people, and the Apostle Paul gave Titus instructions regarding the teaching of the various generations.

This multigenerational picture of the early church is not only seen in Paul’s letter to Titus, but it is also evident in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. Like Titus, Timothy was a young pastor, but one of their differences was that Titus was the pastor of a new church on the island of Crete, and Timothy was the pastor of the established church in Ephesus. Regardless of the age of the congregation, it is extremely important to note that both churches consisted of multiple generations. Paul tells Timothy not to harshly rebuke an older man. Once again the term for an older man at least implies a man in his late fifties or early sixties. Timothy is told to exhort him as if he were his father. Timothy was to treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters. Paul reminds Timothy that the church is the family of God. These words must have prompted Timothy to think of the fifth commandment, which states, “Honor your father and your mother, so that

¹²⁴ Titus 2:7-8.

you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”¹²⁵ Even though Timothy had spiritual authority, he was to treat the older men with the highest level of respect. He was to honor the older women as he honored his mother Eunice. He was to never hold his authority over the heads of his peers. He was to treat younger men as brothers and treat the younger generation of women as sisters “with absolute purity.”¹²⁶ As Paul warned Titus, he also warned Timothy to safeguard his ministry against any sexual temptation. The women of Timothy’s generation were to be viewed as sisters in Christ for whom Jesus died to save.¹²⁷ Paul’s instructions to both Titus and Timothy reveal that the early church was comprised of people from multiple generations.

While the Bible does not give a definitive mandate to preach to multiple generations simultaneously, the Bible does teach that God’s instruction can be understood by people of every age, and there are scriptural snapshots of the early church that reveal a multigenerational ministry context. Paul taught Titus and Timothy that the minister must relate to each generation and gender in the congregation in appropriate ways. The Bible infers that the preacher has the responsibility to teach God’s Word with clarity to whoever is in the audience regardless of age.

The Multiple Generations of the 21st Century Congregation

The growth in the number of generations within the church today is a recent phenomenon in the United States. Since 1900 the life expectancy in America has dramatically increased. Over the last hundred years, death rates have dropped for all

¹²⁵ Exodus 20:12.

¹²⁶ I Timothy 5:2.

¹²⁷ Barclay, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 149-151.

ages and especially for the young. In 2002 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that 78% of boys and 86% of girls born in America live to the age of sixty-five. “Today, the vast majority of children born in the United States can expect to live through childhood and into their eighth decade or beyond.”¹²⁸ The U. S. Census Bureau reported that in 2004 there were 36.3 million Americans 65 years of age or older. It is predicted by the Census Bureau that by 2050 that number will have more than doubled to approximately 86.7 million people.¹²⁹

According to these findings, it is clear that more people are living longer, healthier lives than ever before, and the numbers of people living longer, active lives have dramatically increased in the recent decades. One of the effects this has upon the church is that the multigenerational congregation is not a fleeting trend. The multigenerational church will continue to grow and expand well into the 21st century.

In his book entitled *One Church, Four Generations*, Gary McIntosh identifies four generational waves in our American culture. Being fascinated with the ocean, McIntosh intentionally uses the terminology of waves. Just as waves crash into each other and have the potential of producing vicious riptides of undercurrent, so too generational waves collide causing potentially strong undercurrents of turbulence within both the American society and the American church. “That is why it is essential to understand each generational wave and how it affects the other waves to effectively serve God’s purpose today.”¹³⁰ McIntosh identifies at least four

¹²⁸ Gorina Y., Hoyert D., Lentzner H., and Goulding M., “Trends in Causes of Death Among Older Persons in the United States,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/nchs/agingact.htm, accessed April, 2007.

¹²⁹ Unknown author, “Highlights in Minority Health May, 2006,” CDC, <http://www.cdc.gov/omh/Highlights/2006/HMay06.htm>, accessed April 22, 2007.

¹³⁰ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 24.

generations within our culture. The Builder generation describes people born before 1946. This generation of individuals literally helped to build the American society in which we live. The people of this generation are highly respected for their work ethic and sense of sacrifice. The Builder generation constitutes approximately 19% of America's population and currently the people of this generation are sixty-two years of age or older. The people born from 1947-1964 are called the Boomer generation. In the years that followed World War II, the birth rate boomed at an unprecedented rate. The Boomer generation represents the largest generation in America's history and comprises approximately 28% of the country's population. Today the people of this generation are forty-four to sixty-one years old. The Buster generation is the title given to the people born from 1965-1983. The population of this generation did not rival the numbers of the previous generation; therefore, some sociologists have called it a bust. This generation makes up 24% of the nation's population and today the people of this generation are twenty-five to forty-three years old. The Bridger generation describes the generation of people who serves as a bridge between the 20th and 21st centuries. The Bridger generation consists of individuals born from 1984-2002. They are the second largest generation of people comprising 27% of the national population. Today this youthful, yet powerful generation is six to twenty-four years old.

Discussion Questions

At this point, divide the participants into discussion groups of three to four people and give them ten minutes to answer the following questions.

- What generation do you belong?
- What percentage of Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers are in the Sunday morning congregation where you preach?
- Does the church where you preach mirror the population demographic of our country or is there a large discrepancy among one or more of the generations?

Builder Generation

In America the Builder generation consists of approximately fifty-four million people. That is nineteen percent of the U.S. population.¹³¹ The people of this generation were born before 1946. While McIntosh admits that some sociologists further divide this generation into three smaller subgroups – the G.I. generation (born before 1925 and fought in both World Wars), the Silent generation (born between 1926-1939), and the War Babies (born during World War II 1940-1945) – he argues that all three of these subgroups are strikingly similar in values and perceptions. He writes, “Generally speaking, when the pace of change is relatively slow, succeeding generations are alike. Since the pace of change was not as rapid in the first half of the twentieth century as it was in the second half, these subgroups tend to share many characteristics.”¹³²

This generation was influenced and shaped by the events of the Great War, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, and World War II. While it can be misleading to apply sweeping characteristics to a particular generation, there are certain attributes that many people of this generation consistently exhibit. Since America was largely an agrarian society in the first half of the twentieth century, the people of this generation learned the value of hard work. The scarcity of commodities during the Great Depression and the rationing of items during World War II prompted this generation to be frugal, to sacrifice for the sake of others, and to be financially conservative. Patriotism is a high priority to many Builders. They willingly and bravely fought for freedom, the advancement of democracy, and the

¹³¹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 27.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 29-30.

protection of America. The formative events of the first half of the twentieth century galvanized within this generation a sense of loyalty and commitment to any cause deemed worthy.

This sense of loyalty and commitment among the people of this generation can be seen in their involvement within the institutional church. Denominational devotion is important, and for many Builders church attendance is used to evaluate a person's level of religious commitment. The Builders regularly give of their time, money, and energy to the local church. A common statement made by a person from this generation is, "Whenever the doors of the church were opened, we were there."¹³³

In their book entitled *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church*, Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter agree with McIntosh as they describe the personality of the Builder generation as being marked by scarcity (due to their living during the Great Depression) and sacrifice (due to their living during World War II). Whitesel and Hunter suggest that in their worship service, many Builders appreciate effort even more than the outcome. A less than perfect singer can be praised simply because she gives her best effort. If that is true for the singer, then I suspect it could also be true of the preacher. Whitesel and Hunter conclude, "Thus, Builders often worship in an atmosphere that embraces an appreciation for the effort expended over the outcome experienced."¹³⁴

Andrew Carl Wisdom reminds preachers in his book entitled *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly* that the Builder generation learns by linear propositions.

¹³³ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 91.

¹³⁴ Whitesel and Hunter, *A House Divided*, 169-170.

The Builders have a can-do attitude, and they respond well to a challenge or call to repentance. They are linear thinkers by nature; therefore, they appreciate sermons with clear points that flow logically.¹³⁵ The Builder generation helped to give birth to the three point sermon.

When it comes to preaching that connects with the Builder generation, vertical sermons are highly effective. Vertical sermons stress the exposition of the Bible, and it aims to touch the person's mind. Traditional messages, such as in-depth Bible studies or evangelistic sermons with a strong appeal for commitment, are preferable and effective with this generation. "Builders like to nod in agreement with the truth they already know. They love to hear the old, old story over and over."¹³⁶

Boomer Generation

The largest generation in America is the Boomer generation (born 1946-1964). In the years that followed World War II, the birth rate dramatically increased across the nation. This generation totals seventy-four to seventy-six million people. It makes up close to twenty-eight percent of the population. The parents of this Boomer generation did not want their children to do without any of life's amenities. They did not want their children to live as they had lived during the days of the Great Depression. Times were changing and America's economy following World War II was growing as fast as this new generation.

The formative experiences of the Boomers include tremendous economic, educational, and technological growth following World War II. While the Builders can remember life without television, the Boomers can not recall life without it. This

¹³⁵ Wisdom, *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*, 52.

¹³⁶ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 204.

generation was shaped by the events of the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boomers can recall with vivid clarity the events surrounding November 22, 1963 just as spontaneously as the Builder generation can dramatically remember the events of December 7, 1941. The former date marks the assassination of President Kennedy while the latter date marks the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese military signifying America's entrance into World War II. The demeanor of the Boomer generation was also shaped by the Vietnam War and Watergate.

The culmination of these events helped to forge this generation's personality. As a result of the economic growth in America, many Boomers were able to attend college and receive higher education. The formative Boomer years were filled with various social causes and protests. Some Boomers marched for civil rights, protested America's involvement in Vietnam, and volunteered for the Peace Corp. While many Builders had an overall trust in authority, the Boomers developed a mistrust of the government, military, and most forms of authority.¹³⁷

In their book entitled *The Generation Driven Church: Evangelizing Boomers, Busters, and Millennials*, William and Le Etta Benke itemize a similar list of historical events that have been instrumental in the shaping of the Boomer generation. Events such as the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and Watergate, brought widespread disillusionment to the Boomer generation concerning numerous sources of authority, which the Builders had highly valued.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 71-88.

¹³⁸ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 21.

The Boomer generation is the most studied generation in American history, and often times this generation is described as being rebellious, self-absorbed, affluent, and independent. This generation is open to the ministry of the local church. The people of this generation will not minister out of a sense of duty or obligation, but they will do ministry that fits their interests, needs, and provides a sense of fulfillment.¹³⁹

Benke reports that about 60% of Boomers dropped out of church for a period of two years or more sometime during their adolescence or adulthood. While that statistic might not be too staggering, Benke continues by writing that almost all Boomers (90%) were raised in a religious tradition.¹⁴⁰

Benke characterizes the Boomer generation as having low loyalty toward institutions and denominational labels. Boomers maintain high expectations and have a sense of entitlement; therefore, ministries that flourish for Boomers are those that provide high quality programs and facilities. The ministries that appeal to Boomers are pragmatic in their approach to Christianity.

Boomers view religion as a positive influence in their lives as long as it some way enhances their living. They look for churches that meet their needs as opposed to looking for places to serve. They do not come to church just for the sake of learning. They are looking for messages that are related to everyday life and have practical application for their life experiences. They are attracted to how-to sermons,

¹³⁹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 93.

¹⁴⁰ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 43.

and they desire to hear sermons that will help them break the destructive patterns of addiction and dysfunction that have dominated much of their lives.¹⁴¹

The sermon that best connects with Boomers is one that conveys relevance and practicality to daily living. It must be horizontal. Horizontal sermons “stress the practical application of the Bible and tend to be oriented to touching people’s hearts.”¹⁴² Boomers want to hear practical preaching that will help them get through the week. They can appreciate the old, old story, but they want to be challenged with something they do not already know. They want to know how the truth of the Bible will improve their lives throughout the week. The preacher must diligently demonstrate the relevance of God’s word to this generation.

The worship service that connects with Boomers is not measured by effort but professionalism. The service, programs, and facility have to be professionally run with high quality, up-to-date technology. Boomers want sermons pertaining to the important issues of the day, and they want to receive guidance from the Bible on controversial topics.¹⁴³ Boomers are driven to excellence in all areas of life, and they expect the same even from their preacher. They are often drawn by professional programs for their children.

Buster Generation

The generation of people born between 1965 and 1983 is called the Buster generation. They represent sixty-six million Americans and equate to twenty-four percent of the population.¹⁴⁴ Part of the reason that the population of this generation

¹⁴¹ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 41-51.

¹⁴² McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 204.

¹⁴³ Whitesel and Hunter, *A House Divided*, 170-171.

¹⁴⁴ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 122.

did not surpass the previous generation is because of the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in the infamous *Roe v. Wade* case. Even though the oldest Busters were only eight years old at the time of this decision, this court ruling had a major impact upon this generation not only numerically but also psychologically.

McIntosh reports that more than forty percent of Busters are children of divorce. This generation is twice as likely to come from broken homes as their parents and three times more likely than their grandparents.¹⁴⁵ This is the first generation where children were described as “latchkey kids.” In many cases either both parents worked outside the home building their careers, or the child was raised by a single parent who worked long hours out of necessity. Many busters came home from school to an empty house.

Some of the formative events of this generation include the explosion of the Challenger shuttle on January 28, 1986, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the devastating effects of the sexual revolution, which resulted in the AIDS epidemic and other sexually transmitted diseases, the increased divorce rate, and the dilemmas such as world hunger, pollution, the national deficit, and homelessness. These events developed within the Busters a longing for genuine relationships and a sense of belonging.

This generation has been taught by the society and the school system that there are no absolutes, morality is relative, and truth is subjective. McIntosh accurately observes, “An absence of good values, the frustration of isolation, and the

¹⁴⁵ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 132-133.

emptiness of their lives are all leading many Busters on a spiritual search.”¹⁴⁶ They have all the gadgets to make life easier, but Busters have discovered that these technological inventions can still leave people isolated. This is a generation of seekers who are looking for truth, and they are very open to churches that will help them on their search for truth. Sermons that connect to this generation must be honest, straightforward, and direct. The length of the service and/or sermon does not matter as long as the content is real and not considered to be a waste of time. Busters learn through experience and the use of visual images. Do not assume that they know how to put the message into practice – the preacher must connect the dots for them.¹⁴⁷

Benke describes the Buster generation as children of divorced and dysfunctional families. Benke writes, “They resent the wide disparity between themselves and the Boomer generation in terms of quality of childhood, educational and job opportunities, and the future outlook in terms of financial security and achieving the great American dream.”¹⁴⁸

The Buster generation is a spiritually sensitive generation of people who seek real relationships and the acceptance of a mutually caring community. The Builders emphasize the effort of the worshipper while the Boomer generation emphasizes excellence in program-oriented ministry, but the Buster generation longs for realness in relationships. Busters want ministry and sermons that are real, relevant, and relational. The preacher plays an important role in establishing this relationship with his audience, which is a relationship that goes outside of the pulpit. Since Busters long for community and relationships, it is a requirement that preachers live their

¹⁴⁶ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 139.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 138-156.

¹⁴⁸ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 62.

story with observable “authenticity, integrity, and humility.”¹⁴⁹ Busters will not commit to Christianity until they find some credible Christians to observe. Before the Gospel can be heard by Busters, it must first be seen in the lives of other people. Busters do not often “respond to invitations after a stirring evangelistic message. They appear to need time to absorb the message and observe the reality as it is lived out in the lives of Christians close to them.”¹⁵⁰

Busters want to hear real-life examples where God has delivered people through difficult situations. The narrative approach is the most effective way to deliver a sermon to a Buster audience. This storytelling approach is an acceptable method to reach many Busters because everyone has a story that is worth hearing. Busters understand that they can not argue with a person’s story. Busters do not want to be told the truth, but they are willing to discover the truth together. Benke writes, “Sermons steeped in reasoned arguments do not resonate with Xers (Busters), but sermons take on meaning when packaged in a story context that conveys the same truth.”¹⁵¹

In his interview with Michael Duduit of *Preaching* magazine, George Barna comments that he has observed a growing openness to faith among Americans in general and within the Buster generation specifically. People are searching for something beyond themselves. They know that the answers to their questions can not be found in themselves, their careers, or materialism; therefore, people are seeking answers in the spiritual realm. Barna makes an important observation in this interview that has tremendous implications on preaching to Busters. He says:

¹⁴⁹ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 72.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 107.

The buster generation (those born since 1965) is a very spiritually intense generation. A major difference is that it is the first American generation – at least that I can tell – that has ever had a starting point for their spiritual journey that was not Christianity. In the past you started with Christianity, and you probably ended up there. And if you started there but it didn't work for you, at least you had that Christian experience. Now we increasingly see people under the age of thirty who started in other places – maybe with Eastern mysticism, maybe with the Muslim faith, maybe with Buddhism, or another faith system – and, if their systems don't work, then they may get around to Christianity. But it is no longer a given that one starts with Christianity and branches out.¹⁵²

Whitesel and Hunter comment that for the Busters, the Builder service would look too antiquated and the Boomer service would appear too slick. The Buster generation prefers an interactive, fast-paced, multifaceted worship experience. Buster sermons might include clips from a popular movie, a contemporary music video, or even a snippet from the nightly news.¹⁵³ Intimacy and interaction are high priorities for Busters and they appreciate the opportunity to break into small groups for prayer or discussion during the service.

Bridger Generation

The fourth generation is called the Bridger generation. This is the generation that was born between 1984 and 2002. They number approximately seventy-four million people and represent twenty-seven percent of the population in the United States.¹⁵⁴ While it is difficult to itemize the particular events that have influenced this generation, the attacks on September 11, 2001 will forever be remembered by the Bridger generation. It will be to the Bridger generation what the assassination of

¹⁵² Barna, "Boomers, Busters & Preaching: An Interview with George Barna," 7-8.

¹⁵³ Whitesel and Hunter, *A House Divided*, 169-172.

¹⁵⁴ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 162.

John F. Kennedy was to the Boomers and the bombing of Pearl Harbor was for the Builders.

This generation is technologically advanced. They can not fathom life without computers, cell phones, the internet, and MTV. They are highly interactive and are capable of spontaneously clicking from one bit of information to another. It is not uncommon for a Bridger to use instant message, participate in a chat room with six of his friends, watch MTV videos through his computer, and work on a research paper using the Internet. In 1994 it was estimated that approximately 5.4 million people used the web. In 2001 that number had exploded to at least 50 million people.¹⁵⁵

This is a generation of postmodernism. It is a generation of people tolerant of diversity and fragmented in preferences. McIntosh describes the postmodern world as one where “value is placed on diversity, justice, and tolerance of multiple points of view. Truth is found by giving serious consideration to inclusive, interactive, complex systems of thought.”¹⁵⁶ Postmodernism is both divergent and paradoxical. It is divergent in that a problem may have several correct or acceptable answers. It is paradoxical in that some of the acceptable answers are apparent contradictions.

Postmodernism is a philosophy that all truth is subjective and relative to situations and circumstances. There is an adamant rejection of absolute truth. People who hold to postmodernism have concluded that neither “reason, science, nor divine revelation provides objective, absolute truth.”¹⁵⁷ According to postmodernism, all religions are equally valid as expressions of truth and reality, which demands not only

¹⁵⁵ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 175.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 165.

¹⁵⁷ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 26.

diversity of belief but also unconditional tolerance of those beliefs. When people enter church with this philosophical backdrop, they do not recognize the Scripture as authoritative in their lives, and Christianity is viewed as one among many equally-valid religious concepts. It is believed that all religious concepts have “something positive to offer but none [have] a monopoly on spiritual truth.”¹⁵⁸ This postmodern culture, which is by definition pluralistic, does not regard the Christian faith as the only way to truth, but Christianity is perceived as one among many valid religions.¹⁵⁹

Once again in his interview with Michael Duduit, George Barna succinctly captures the spirit of postmodernism when he says:

What used to take place did so because we were such a homogeneous population. You could throw out the shingle and let people know we were in business and pretty much everybody who lived in the community was similar in some key ways. You no longer have that luxury. Now if you’ve got 100,000 people who live in the community, you probably have 100,000 different lifestyles and value systems.¹⁶⁰

McIntosh claims that propositional truth will not engage this youngest generation. The key to communicating with a Bridger is to engage him with a compelling true story of faith. Effective communication with this generation will require acceptance on the part of the caring community. Most Bridgers are skeptical of almost everything; therefore, they desire to belong to a community before they give their lives to Christ. It is in the process of belonging that they come to a point of belief. The Bridger generation highly values genuine relationships. An authentic Christian life will speak more to the people of this generation than merely a Bible study. The study of the Bible is important, but this generation will not sit through it

¹⁵⁸ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 36.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 123.

¹⁶⁰ Barna, “Boomers, Busters & Preaching: An Interview with George Barna,” 4-5.

unless a relationship already exists. If a real, genuine relationship already exists, then the people of this generation are much more willing to listen, accept, and embrace the truth being communicated to them. Authenticity is the benchmark of quality for the Bridger generation. Some of the best ways to effectively communicate with this generation is through storytelling, interactive learning, and apologetics.¹⁶¹

This youngest generation has been characterized as tolerant, diverse, relative, and resistant to absolutes. The big question on the minds of this generation that must be addressed by today's preacher is, "Why is Christianity the only way to God?"¹⁶²

Andrew Carl Wisdom highlights the skepticism of both the Busters and the Bridgers when he describes these generations as constantly asking why they should believe the claims of Christianity over the claims of another religion. This youngest generation seeks a relevant message that addresses real everyday life.¹⁶³

Discussion Questions

Divide the group into groups of three to four people and answer the following questions.

- Based upon your experience, do these descriptions of Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers accurately portray the different generations?
- What impact does this diversity among generations have upon preaching?

[Following time for these discussion questions, the group will take a 20 minute break.]

¹⁶¹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 228.

¹⁶² Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 81-83.

¹⁶³ Wisdom, *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*, 52-53.

Session #2

Communication that Connects

The outcome of Session #2 will be the completion of Goal #2. At the conclusion of this session preachers will be able to explain four ways to connect their sermons to the life experiences of the multigenerational listeners.

As the preacher stands to proclaim the message to a multigenerational audience, the Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers bring their various experiences, life situations, perceptions, expectations, and questions. The Builders ask the preacher, “Will you challenge me today by reminding me of solid biblical truth?” The Boomers ask the preacher, “Show me how the truth of what you have to say will help me in my life.” The Busters say to the preacher, “If you are not going to be genuine and real, then do not waste my time telling me your truth.” The Bridgers in the congregation ask the preacher, “What is truth?”

When George Barna was asked by Michael Duduit of *Preaching* magazine to compare and contrast the Boomers and Busters, Barna said:

It would be very, very difficult for the same church to reach the Boomer and Buster. First of all, there is an animosity between the generations. Second, their styles of communication are different. Third, the ways in which they define success are different. Fourth their lifestyles are very different. I have looked at a lot of churches that claim they are reaching both generations and, frankly, when you come right down to it there are at best a handful of churches around the country that are doing it well. I think you almost have to develop independent congregations, which may be under the same umbrella. It may all be ‘First Church,’ but there is probably a congregation of boomers, a congregation of busters, a congregation of builders, and a congregation of seniors all under that umbrella.¹⁶⁴

George Barna is not alone in this opinion of the generation-specific congregation. In their book entitled *The Generation Driven Church*, William and Le

¹⁶⁴ Barna, “Boomers, Busters & Preaching: An Interview with George Barna,” 10.

Etta Benke conclude that the “preponderance of evidence, however, seems to indicate that generationally segmented worship may be the best strategy for reaching today’s unchurched masses.”¹⁶⁵ Bob Whitesel and Kent Hunter advocate forming a Tri-Generational church. In their book entitled *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church*, they define a Tri-Generational church as “a holistic congregation with three distinct generational sub-congregations peacefully coexisting under one roof, one name, and one leadership core.”¹⁶⁶ While I do not question the potential effectiveness of this ministry approach nor do I fail to respect the tremendous insight of these various individuals, however, I do question the practicality of this type of ministry approach for the vast majority of churches in America. Most churches do not have the resources or personnel to conduct multiple generation-specific services.

It is possible for preachers to connect their sermons to the various generations of listeners within the congregation. There are at least four ways preachers can do this through their communication. First, preachers should layer sermon illustrations and applications broadly yet specifically. Second, preachers must learn to visualize the audience even in sermon preparation. Third, preachers must learn ways to listen to their listeners. Fourth, preachers must utilize some basic journalistic principles in their sermon preparation and delivery.

Layering Sermonic Illustrations and Applications

Whitesel and Hunter write, “If a pastor were delivering a sermon to these three [generational] groups simultaneously, the sermon might have to have three

¹⁶⁵ Benke, *The Generation Driven Church*, 100.

¹⁶⁶ Whitesel and Hunter, *A House Divided*, 28.

separate applications to meet the different needs or aspirations of each generation.”¹⁶⁷

The key to effective illustrations and applications is found in specificity. The temptation is to reduce our speaking, illustrations, and applications to the lowest common denominator and speak in generalities. But according to Andrew Carl Wisdom, one of the worst mistakes preachers can make is to attempt to “preach broadly to the middle of the congregation and hope it will land on as many as possible.”¹⁶⁸ Donald Miller likened preaching to shooting quail. He said that if the shooter aims for all the birds then he will hit none of them, but if he aims for one specifically then he will probably hit several of them.

In his article entitled “Preaching to Everyone in Particular,” Haddon Robinson writes, “The surprising thing is that the more directed and personal a message, the more universal it becomes.”¹⁶⁹ In preparation for a sermon on conflict Robinson writes, “You live with your roommate, and your roommate has some irritating habits, like not cleaning the dishes right after the meal. Or you’re married, and your husband comes home and plops himself in front of the TV without any regard for what your day has been like.”¹⁷⁰ While these two specific scenarios do not encompass every situation of conflict for all ages or experiences, every person in the audience can identify with these specific situations and the feelings they evoke.

We want people to be able to see themselves in the sermons we preach. The likelihood of this increases the more we layer our illustrations and applications broadly yet specifically. The preacher’s goal is to connect the truth of the passage

¹⁶⁷ Whitesel and Hunter, *A House Divided*, 85.

¹⁶⁸ Wisdom, *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*, 14.

¹⁶⁹ Haddon Robinson, “Preaching to Everyone in Particular,” *Leadership*, (Fall 1994): 100.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

with a broad cross-section of the audience. Layering can be accomplished in two ways. Either the preacher can provide multiple, independent illustrations like pearls on a string, or the preacher can utilize one illustration that intersects specifically with multiple generations. Allow me to give an example of this second type of layering.

In his sermon on Luke 19:1-10, Bruce Thielemann connects beautifully with a cross-section of a multigenerational audience. He introduced his sermon by saying:

It was on the wall of a subway in New York City. There was an advertising poster which depicted a dignified older gentleman recommending a particular product. And someone, probably a little boy, wanted to deface the advertisement, so he drew a balloon coming out of the mouth of this dignified older gentleman, and then this youngster wrote in the balloon the dirtiest thing he could think of. He wrote, "I like ____," and he meant to write "girls," only he made a mistake, and instead of writing "girls," he wrote "grils." "I like grils."

Then someone had come along and with a felt-tipped pen had written under that, "It's 'girls,' stupid, not 'grils.'"

Then another party, for the handwriting was still different, had come and written under that, "But then what about us grils?"

Now what about us grils? What about the people that nobody seems to like? What about the people who feel they've been crowded out of the middle of life, shoved aside, pushed somewhere they don't want to be? What about us grils?

A young man sat in my apartment about three weeks ago and with tears rolling down his face told me that the other kids thought he was weird. They oft-times isolated him. He told me in so many words he was a gril. Well, this sermon is dedicated to him.

A girl in her middle twenties said to me some months ago that she wanted to get into the middle of the garden of life. She wanted to be the kind of flower that people sometimes saw and noticed and appreciated. She was saying to me, in so many words, "I'm tired of being a gril." And this sermon is my response to her.

I know an older gentleman who deeply loved his wife and lost her to death. They were a beautiful couple in every way that you might choose to describe people. When she was gone, he said to me with tears (grils cry a lot), "Life seems to be passing me by. It's rushing on all the time, and I don't seem to be able to get on to it anymore. I'm on the outside looking in, and it makes me desperately lonely." He was saying to me in so many words that he feels like a gril.

Then there's the person who's isolated because he's fat. They know people look at their fat and think about their fat. There are people who

are homely. There are people who have never been taught the social graces. They feel awkward, as if they have three legs or four eyes. It's not a nice way to feel. It's like dying over a long, long time. It's hard being a gril.¹⁷¹

Did you catch the various generational layers in this opening illustration? When Bruce Thielemann announced that he was going to talk about the gril named Zacchaeus everyone in the crowd was captivated and ready to listen because they could identify with the feelings of being a gril. Thielemann had layered his illustration broadly yet specifically so that everyone in the audience could identify with these people and enter into the sermon.

Visualizing the Audience in Sermon Preparation

A second way preachers can connect their sermons to the life experiences of the various generations of listeners within the congregation is to visualize the audience even in sermon preparation. In his book entitled *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* Roger Van Harn provides two quotes that are helpful for the preacher who is attempting to connect with a multigenerational audience. The first quote is from Thomas Long who advocates visualizing the listeners during the sermon preparation. Listen to the following quote and identify ways you see him visualizing the audience. Long writes:

It is not enough, though, to go to the Bible only with our own lives in view. We must self-consciously embody the needs and situations of others, especially those who are different from ourselves. Some preachers find it helpful, as part of the process of interpreting the scripture, to visualize the congregation that will be present when the sermon is preached. They survey the congregation in their mind's eye, seeing there the familiar faces and the lives behind them. They see the adults and the children, the families and those who are single, those

¹⁷¹ Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 40-41.

who participate actively in the church's mission and those who stand cautiously on the edges of the church's life. They see those for whom life is full and good and those for whom life is composed of jagged pieces. They see the regulars sitting in their customary places, and they see the stranger, the newcomer, the visitor, hesitating and wondering if there is a place for them. They see the people who are there, and they see the people who cannot be there, or who choose not to be there. When preachers turn to the scripture, all these people go with them. Other preachers invite members of the congregation actually to participate with them in exploring the biblical text, gathering a small group early in the sermon development process to listen to the text, to study it together, to raise questions about it, and to name the concerns it evokes.¹⁷²

At the very least, each preacher should visualize two specific people from each of the four generations. In your mind, invite those eight individuals to join you in the sermon preparation process and at strategic points along the way ask yourself, "How can this truth be applied to Sue and how would Alan receive this point?"

As people listen to the sermon, they bring with them a mixed bag of emotions and needs. There are needs that they wish to hide, other needs that need to be met, and still additional needs that are not even known. The needs that are carried to the pew are wrapped up in the events of daily life. These are the needs that are brought to the preaching moment, and the wise preacher knows, understands, and speaks to the needs of the people.

Van Harn's second quotation comes from Lewis Smedes, who one day looked around at the congregation and saw numerous people of every age carrying various needs that had to be addressed. Smedes writes:

A man and woman, sitting board-straight, smiling on cue at every piece of funny piety, are hating each other for letting romance in their marriage collapse on a tiring treadmill of tasteless, but always tidy tedium.

¹⁷² Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 56.

A widow, whispering her Amens to every promise of divine providence, is frightened to death because the unkillable beast of inflation is devouring her savings.

A father, the congregational model of parental firmness, is fuming in the suspicion of his own fatherly failure because he cannot stomach, much less understand, the furious antics of a slightly crazy son.

An attractive young woman in the front pew is absolutely paralyzed, sure she has breast cancer.

A middle-aged fellow who, with his new Mercedes, is an obvious Christian success story, is wondering when he will ever have the guts to tell his boss to take his lousy job and shove it.

A submissive wife of one of the elders is terrified because she is being pushed to face up to her closet alcoholism.

Ordinary people, all of them, and there are a lot more where they came from.¹⁷³

These are the people who make up a multigenerational congregation. These are the needs of their everyday lives. As the preacher visualizes these specific people with their individualized needs, the truth of the passage begins to take shape in the mind of the preacher and can then be directly and specifically applied to the listener. When we speak to people merely about the Bible, we loose them in a sea of irrelevance even though there are times when the biblical discussion can be quite interesting. When we speak to people about their lives from the pages of the Bible, we grab them with the transformation truth of God's eternal word.

Discussion Questions

At this time divide all the participants into two groups to review these first two recommendations. Use Case Study 1 (Appendix 2) and ask Group 1 to practice layering sermonic illustrations and applications broadly yet specifically. Ask Group 2 to visualize and describe the audience who would hear this sermon on Psalm 51.

- (Group 1) Specifically layer the application of the Big Idea from Psalm 51 to a Builder, Boomer, Buster, and Bridger.
- (Group 2) Visualize and describe at least one person from each generation in your congregation to whom Psalm 51 would be applied.

¹⁷³ Smedes, "Preaching to Ordinary People," *Leadership*, 116.

Listening to the Listeners

A third way preachers can connect their sermons to the various generations of listeners within the congregation is to learn how to listen to the listeners. Much can be learned from the congregation by simply taking the time to ask questions and listen to their answers. Sometimes it is not enough to just visualize the audience. There are times when it would be extremely helpful to literally invite the listeners into the preaching process.

One of the primary ways Van Harn suggests for preachers to listen to the listeners is by enlisting up to four congregation members to keep a four-week journal. Throughout the days of each week every participant is to describe something of importance that occurred in her life that day. It can be an event, experience, thought, fear, need, question, or doubt. Then each participant is to record specific words of faith that were important to him that day. These words could come from the Bible, a song, a creed, a book, or another person. On the page of the journal reserved for Sunday, the listener is asked to complete four statements related to the sermon.

1. The sermon was about...
2. The sermon enabled me to believe that...
3. The sermon asked that I...
4. The sermon made me feel...

Each week the listeners turn in their journals to the pastor with the understanding that every response is kept in confidence. At the end of the process the participants meet with the pastor to discuss the experience. This entire process is an attempt to help the preacher listen to the listener.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*, 138-139.

Another way to learn how to listen to the listener is by periodically utilizing focus groups in sermon preparation. A focus group consists of 6-8 people representing a congregational cross-section of generations, genders, church involvement, and socio-economic distinctions. The meeting of this focus group could occur either several days before the delivery of the sermon or a few days following the preaching experience. If the meeting occurred prior to the delivery of the sermon, then the preacher would prepare some questions in advance, propose the questions to the group, and facilitate the discussion by soliciting a response from each member. The preacher's main task is to listen intently.

In preparation for a Father's Day sermon, I assembled a focus group of six individuals and we discussed Psalm 127. After giving a brief overview of the text, I asked the following six questions: "What makes a good father? What is a father's greatest challenge today? Do you think that fatherhood has changed in the last fifty years? If so, in what ways? What are areas of improvement for fathers in our community? How does a person's relationship with his/her earthly father influence that person's perception of the Heavenly Father? How does Psalm 127 speak to fathers today?" The answers were insightful and the sermon was greatly enhanced because I had taken the time to listen to the listeners. Not only did this process help me listen to the congregation but this exercise also gave some ownership of the sermon to these specific listeners. On that particular Sunday they listened more intently because these listeners had something invested in it.

Utilizing Basic Journalistic Principles

A fourth way preachers can connect their sermons to the various generations of listeners within the congregation is to utilize some basic journalistic principles in sermon preparation and delivery. One of the most helpful books regarding connecting sermons to the congregation is a book that contains very little about multigenerational preaching, but it has everything to do with helping the preacher connect with the contemporary audience. In their book entitled *Preaching that Connects: Using Journalistic Techniques to Add Impact*, Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson apply several basic journalistic principles to preaching. Five of these principles are particularly helpful.

The first journalistic principle is that the introduction must arrest the attention of the audience. The introduction must grab both the head and the heart of the listener. If the opening sentence aims at the head of the listener, then the development of the introduction must address the listener's heart. The authors write, "Fail here and we imply that we will be talking about a subject rather than speaking to living, breathing, feeling, needy people. Succeed here, and people will be unable to pull away from the sermon."¹⁷⁵

The second journalistic technique conveys the necessity to illustrate more than explain. Galli and Larson write, "We live in a visual, image-saturated culture. The more mental pictures we use, the more memorable, evocative, and understandable will be our sermons."¹⁷⁶ The key to the illustration is to be as specific as possible in

¹⁷⁵ Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 38.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

the description. The difference between specific and vague is many times the difference between being interesting and boring. To say that Americans are obsessed with materialism is vague, but it could be stated more specifically by saying, “Americans pant for wide-screen color televisions, Sony CD players, ski trips to Vale, and hot-red Miatas.”¹⁷⁷ Earlier in the book Galli and Larson write:

Being specific means saying *Luger*, rather than *weapon*; '89 *Taurus*, rather than *vehicle*; *adultery*, rather than *sin*; *the nails through Christ's palms*, rather than *Christ's sufferings*; *Bob, the 45-year-old, overweight Chicago detective with the scar on the back of his hand*, rather than *the officer*. The gunpowder is in specifics, the more precise the better.¹⁷⁸

The third journalistic principle that the preacher ought to employ is the necessity to put a face on the story. People like illustrations about other people. Illustrations can come from mathematics and mechanics, but stories about real people with genuine struggles and victories are more likely to stir the emotion within the audience. Galli and Larson write that one television journalist associated with the show *60 Minutes* said, “The producers never do a story about an issue unless they can find a person to tie that issue to.”¹⁷⁹ They mention the example that the producers would not merely do a story on the destruction of the rain forests, but they would do a story reporting an individual's fight against deforestation. People are curious about other people. People talk about people. People never gossip about principles or propositions. Remember that younger generations are much more willing to listen to a story of faith than a linear proposition of faith. The preacher should tie the biblical truth to a real person. A lived faith is always more convincing and intriguing than a

¹⁷⁷ Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 97.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

theorized faith. Our stories of real people become even more powerful when they are about a real person living in our time. If the majority of our illustrations come from the lives of people living hundreds of years ago, then the audience can get the feeling that the faith we profess is antiquated and out-of-date; however, if the congregation can sense and see contemporary people in our sermons, then our preaching has a ring of relevance.

The fourth technique that the preacher shares with the journalist is the need to show rather than tell. Instead of the preacher standing between the listener and the story telling them the events of the scene, what to think, or how to respond, the preacher can show the listeners what happened thereby allowing them to learn for themselves. This approach fits well into the Buster and Bridger mindset. They typically do not want to be told the truth but they are willing to discover the truth together. Galli and Larson give a simple example of showing versus telling when they write, “‘Johnny was mad’ is telling; ‘Johnny turned red, clenched his teeth, and pounded his fist on the table’ is showing.”¹⁸⁰ Another example of this technique is saying, “David strained to raise Goliath’s sword over his head” instead of merely saying “Goliath’s sword was heavy.”¹⁸¹ The difference can be subtle yet profoundly effective. It is imperative that we tell the story utilizing our five senses. When this is accomplished, we tell the story in a way that is fresh and visible. The authors write, “When we taste, touch, smell, observe, and listen, we tell the story freshly even to those who have heard the story ninety-nine times before.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 76.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

The fifth journalistic principle involves being extremely strategic in word selection. This principle may be obvious since preachers use words to convey their message, but it can not be overstated. They write, “The more we like sentences, like to craft them, play with them for best effect, the more our people will like our preaching.”¹⁸³ Plain words create plain sermons while artistic words help to create interesting sermons. It is permissible for preachers to use more words as long as those words help to paint a more descriptive, detailed picture for the listener. To be meticulous in word selection does not imply that these authors advocate preaching with the use of manuscripts because elsewhere they comment that whenever eye contact is broken the mood vanishes. The delivery must be conversational, and the preacher should use few notes or preferably no notes in the delivery of the sermon. This requires more preparation, but it is preparation that is well worth the time invested.

The implementation of these journalistic techniques will help the preacher to connect with the listener of any generation. Regardless of the specific generation, every listener will appreciate a sermon that arrests his/her attention, illustrates the truth specifically, provides examples of real people, demonstrates rather than explains, and utilizes diligence in word selection.

Discussion Questions

At this time divide the participants into two groups to review these last two recommendations. Use Case Study 2 (Appendix 3) and ask each group to perform the following tasks.

- (Group 1) Formulate five questions that could be asked to a multigenerational focus-group discussion for John 21.
- (Group 2) Craft a multigenerational introduction for John 21 using at least two of the five journalistic principles.

¹⁸³ Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 92.

Conclusion

Preachers must communicate to people. Much can be said of preaching, but fundamentally it is the communication of God's Word to a particular group of people. Through this seminar, we learned much about the people to whom we preach. Many congregations have at least four generations of listeners. The Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers have collided like tidal waves upon the shores of the churches we serve. Sometimes this collision results in destructive riptides. Each generation has been shaped by different historical events and each generation has developed distinct ways of listening and understanding the sermons we preach. The intended outcome of this seminar was that preachers would know how to connect their sermons to the various generations of listeners in the congregation. This seminar offered four ways to connect sermons to the life experiences of the listeners. Preachers were challenged to layer sermonic illustrations and applications broadly yet specifically, visualize the audience in sermon preparation, listen to the listeners, and apply five basic journalistic principles to sermon preparation. Thank you for your attention, involvement, and your willingness to attend this seminar. May God bless you as you faithfully proclaim the truth of his Word to a multigenerational congregation.

CHAPTER FIVE EVALUATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

On Tuesday, January 15, 2008, the preaching seminar entitled *Communication that Connects: Preaching to a Multigenerational Audience* was conducted at Owenton First Baptist Church from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. There were twenty local pastors and lay preachers in attendance. One preacher left early in the first session, but the other nineteen preachers attended the entire seminar and completed the evaluation form.

The opening session lasted approximately seventy minutes and was followed by a fifteen minute break. Following the break, the second session, which lasted an additional sixty minutes, was held. At the end of the evening, each pastor filled out an evaluation form regarding the content and the delivery of the presentation.

The first session was entitled “The Generational Divide.” In this opening session, a detailed description was given for each of the four generations. The second session was entitled, “Communication that Connects.” In this session four recommendations were made to help preachers effectively connect their sermons to the multiple generations of listeners within the congregation. At various points throughout the evening, there were discussion questions and small group interaction. The following is a report based upon the responses given on the evaluation form.

1. To what generation do you belong?

Group Name	Number of Seminar Participants (%)
A. Builder	3 (15%)
B. Boomer	4 (21%)
C. Buster	11 (58%)
D. Bridger	1 (5%)
Total	19

In this seminar there were more preachers from the Buster generation than any other generation. Owen County is a small, rural community with twenty-four Baptist churches in a county of 10,000 residents. The vast majority of these churches have a weekly Sunday morning attendance under one hundred people. Owen County is seventy-five miles from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary located in Louisville, Kentucky and many of these Baptist churches have a history of having seminary students as pastor. Due to these dynamics, it is not surprising that the majority of pastors who attended this seminar were in the Buster generation.

2. Do you routinely preach to a multigenerational congregation?

The answer to this question was a resounding yes! Ninety-five percent of the seminar participants (18 out of 19) responded that they routinely preach to a multigenerational congregation. The only one who responded “no” was the lone youth minister who was in attendance. He was not only the sole youth minister in the crowd, but he was also the only member of the Bridger generation who attended the seminar. I wanted to get at least one representative from each generation but there are no pastors in the local area who are under the age of twenty-four years old. This youth minister, who is a Bridger, routinely speaks to teenagers, who are also Bridgers.

3. How many years have you been preaching?

Group	Number of Participants (%)
A. Less than five years	7 (37%)
B. Between 6-15 years	7 (37%)
C. Between 16-25 years	1 (5%)
D. Between 26-39 years	2 (10%)
E. More than 40 years	2 (10%)

For questions 4-12, each participant was asked to indicate the degree with which he agreed or disagreed with the statements using the following scale.

Strongly Agree (1)....(2)....(3)....(4)....(5) Strongly Disagree

4. *This seminar was communicated in an interesting manner.*

Group Name	Average Score
Builder	1
Boomer	1
Buster	1.45
Bridger	2
Total Average	1.32

5. *This seminar was organized in a way that made sense to me.*

Group Name	Average Score
Builder	1
Boomer	1
Buster	1.36
Bridger	1
Total Average	1.21

The majority of the seminar participants strongly agreed that the content of the workshop was presented in an interesting and well-organized fashion. In both of these questions, the Builders and Boomers gave slightly higher marks than the Busters and Bridgers. Many preachers find the dynamics of multigenerational studies intriguing and this particular group of preachers was no different. They were engaging, interactive, and extremely attentive.

6. *I found the descriptions of the various generations to be accurate and insightful.*

Group Name	Average Score
Builder	1.33
Boomer	1.5
Buster	1.45
Bridger	2
Total Average	1.47

7. *The four recommended ways to connect with the audience were clearly explained.*

Group Name	Average Score
Builder	1
Boomer	1
Buster	1.36
Bridger	1
Total Average	1.21

8. *I believe the four recommendations from this seminar are “doable.”*

Group Name	Average Score
Builder	1.33
Boomer	1.25
Buster	1.54
Bridger	2
Total Average	1.47

Based on the responses to the previous three questions, the participants walked away with an understanding of the material presented. They believed that the content was accurately described and clearly explained. They also indicated that the suggested recommendations were doable. Based upon the score, the implementation of these recommendations was not perceived to be beyond the reach of these overworked, busy pastors, who in some cases are full-time seminary students or bi-vocational ministers. From these scores and comments made after the seminar, many participants expressed an appreciation for the practicality of these specific recommendations. These preachers appreciated that they were being asked to do something that they felt able to do.

9. *In light of this seminar, I will be more intentional in communicating to the various generations within the congregation beginning this Sunday.*

Group Name	Average Score
Builder	1
Boomer	1.5
Buster	1.54

Bridger	2
Total Average	1.47

10. Before tonight's seminar, I rarely considered the different generations in my weekly sermon preparation.

Group Name	Average Score
Builder	2.33
Boomer	2.75
Buster	3.54
Bridger	2
Total Average	3.10

11. After attending this seminar, I feel more confident to speak effectively to the multiple generations of my congregation.

Group Name	Average Score
Builder	2.33
Boomer	1.75
Buster	1.72
Bridger	2
Total Average	1.84

These preachers are consciously aware of the various generations in the audience. This is a subject that they routinely consider in their weekly sermon preparation. In light of this seminar, these participants strongly agreed that they would immediately be more intentional in their communication to the various generations in their congregations. They did however indicate less confidence in their ability to effectively speak to the multiple generations within the congregation. The largest discrepancy between being intentional in multigenerational speech and confident in speaking effectiveness was indicated among the Builders. The Bridger represented the lowest discrepancy between intentional and effective communication.

12. The seminar maintained a good balance of lecture and group discussion.

Group Name	Average Score
Builder	1
Boomer	1

Buster	1.81
Bridger	2
Total Average	1.53

Preachers like to talk. Initially, I had not incorporated enough time for group discussion and class interaction. After being encouraged to allow more time for discussion, I discovered that it was a valuable investment. The participants strongly agreed that there was a good balance between discussion and lecture. After reflecting on the seminar experience, I have concluded that more time given to discussion and interaction would have enhanced that component of the seminar.

13. Do you feel this seminar will make a difference in your preaching? If so, in what way?

Group Name	Responses
Builder	Two out of three Builders said that this seminar would make a difference in their preaching and one of them commented that it was helpful to be reminded of these “preparation skills that may have been less intentional than they should have.” The third Builder merely responded by writing, “I hope so.”
Boomer	Three out of four Boomers commented on how this seminar will help them think more about the people in the pew by utilizing these tools for preaching. The fourth Boomer simply wrote, “I hope so.”
Buster	Ten out of eleven Busters said that this seminar would impact their preaching. The eleventh Buster failed to turn the evaluation form over; therefore, his responses to questions 13-19 were blank. The specific ways in which this seminar will benefit these Busters varied greatly. Some of the responses included, “The greatest impact will be on grabbing the attention from the open and being intentional in my illustrations to reach a broader group.” Another Buster wrote, “Yes, it has helped me think through how much more intentional I must be in applying Scripture.”
Bridger	The one Bridger affirmed the significance of this seminar by writing, “Yes, simply being mindful of my listeners.”

This seminar was relevant, interesting, and helpful to the participants. It is difficult to judge the degree of its effectiveness. Only time will tell how much of an impact this seminar will have on the preachers who participated in it, but at least these preachers believed it would have a positive impact upon their preaching. In the week that followed the seminar, I received two phone calls from local pastors who implemented some of the recommendations in their Sunday sermon and they received immediate, positive comments from their congregations.

14. What was the most helpful part of this seminar?

Group Name	Responses
Builder	Two out of three Builders responded to this question. One builder found the shared insights from the lectures and other participants to be most helpful while the other Builder found the “journalistic principles” to be the most beneficial.
Boomer	All four Boomers gave different answers to this question. One person identified the most helpful part of the seminar as “the application i.e. recommendations.” Another person reported that the journalistic principles were most helpful while still another Boomer found the descriptions of the generations to be most beneficial. The fourth Boomer simply wrote, “thought provoking.”
Buster	Six out of ten Busters who responded to this question found the discussion of the various generations to be most helpful while the other four Busters identified the discussion of the journalistic principles to be most helpful. Clearly, for Busters these two components of the seminar were most beneficial.
Bridger	The Bridger agreed with the four Busters as he identified the “journalistic principles” as the most helpful part of this seminar.

Seven out of nineteen participants reported that the recommendation of the five journalistic principles was most helpful. An additional seven participants commented on the benefit of the detailed descriptions of the four generations. Fourteen out of nineteen (74%) seminar participants commented on the helpfulness of

either the journalistic principles or the descriptions of the generations. The emphasis on these two components of the seminar crossed the generations. The helpfulness of the journalistic principles was not more prominent with one particular generation. All four of the generations benefited from these practical insights for preaching taken from the world of journalism.

15. What was the least helpful portion of the seminar?

Group Name	Responses
Builder	None of the Builders commented to this question.
Boomer	Only one out of four Boomers responded to this question and he stated that the generational descriptions were “general applied and very broad in nature.” Obviously when 300 million people are placed in four age groups, broad and general characteristics will be applied to each group.
Buster	Six out of ten Busters did not report on the least helpful portion of the seminar. The other four Busters commented that Barna’s opinions were not helpful, the group discussions were not beneficial because of lack of time, the break between the sessions was not needed, and the statistical information at the beginning of the opening session was not helpful.
Bridger	The one Bridger participant insightfully commented that the three or four “expert opinions” could have been explained instead of quoted since they were all saying the same thing.

Many people chose not to respond to this question as to not be too critical of the seminar. None of the Builders responded to this question. Perhaps they did not respond because Builders have a tendency to value the effort expended even more than the outcome experienced. They appreciated the effort behind the presentation; therefore, they were not going to be critical of its content. The most helpful suggestion was offered by the youngest participant in the entire group. The “expert

opinions” were all saying the same thing and merely explaining their position would bring more clarity and save valuable time.

16. Which of the four suggested ways to connect with the audience will be the easiest for you to implement in your sermon preparation? Why?

Group Name	Responses
Builder	Two out of three Builders reported visualizing the audience as the easiest to implement. The third Builder identified the journalistic principles as the easiest to implement.
Boomer	Two out of four Boomers identified listening to the listeners as the easiest recommendation to implement while the other two Boomers identified the journalistic principles and layering sermonic illustrations respectfully.
Buster	Four out of ten Busters identified some aspect of the journalistic principles as the easiest recommendation to implement. Two Busters viewed listening to their listeners as the easiest to implement while three other Busters saw visualizing the audience as the easiest for them to do. One out of the ten Busters who commented to this question wrote, “Layered illustration/application – there are an abundance of scenarios you could use to ‘hit home’ with people.”
Bridger	The Bridger agreed that the easiest recommendation to implement is the visualization of the audience because it “doesn’t take much time.”

17. Which of the four suggested ways to connect with the audience will be the most challenging for you to implement in your sermon preparation? Why?

Group Name	Responses
Builder	Two out of the three Builders said that listening to the listeners is the most challenging and the third Builder identified layering sermonic illustrations as the most challenging.
Boomer	Two out of four Boomers identified listening to the listeners as most challenging. The other two Boomers reported that layering sermonic illustrations and utilizing the journalistic techniques would be most challenging.
Buster	Four out of ten Busters identified layering illustrations as the most challenging. Two Busters reported that listening to listeners would be most challenging because it would require more time from their listeners. They questioned if their people would be willing to give that much time to

	the preacher for a focus group or journaling. Four out of ten either made no comment or commented on a part of one of the four recommendations.
Bridger	The Bridger reported listening to the listeners as the most challenging because he would have to “bring in other people and pull them out of their comfort zone.”

Questions 16 and 17 should have been multiple choice answers instead of open-ended responses. Giving the participants four restatements of the recommendations and asking them to choose one of the four would have provided more concrete, accurate conclusions. Four out of ten Busters did not clearly state any of the four recommendations in either question 16 or question 17. They reported parts of one of the recommendations but they did not clearly state any of the four recommendations. These questions could have been written in a clearer fashion for the seminar participants. Three of the participants assumed that the people of their audience would not be willing to give much time to assist the preacher in the preaching process. I discovered throughout this degree program that the individuals of the congregation were eager to help give feedback and assistance along the way.

18. With regard to either the content or presentation, what are two positive comments you could make?

Group Name	Responses
Builder	Two out of three Builders reported that both the content and the presentation of the material were done well. The third Builder commented on the necessity for the preacher to have positive contact with the congregation and to be mindful of the various generational groups.
Boomer	The responses were encouraging yet varied. Some of the comments included, “This makes you look at how you preach and how you prepare your sermons” and “good group participation.”
Buster	All ten Busters commented to some degree on the extensive research, the clarity of the presentation, and/or the interesting manner with which the content of the seminar was delivered.

Bridger	The Bridger commented on the depth of research that went into this presentation and that the recommendations were simple suggestions on how to improve our communication.
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19. With regard to either the content or presentation of this seminar, what are two suggestions you would make to enhance its effectiveness?

Group Name	Responses
Builder	All three Builders reported the need for more time to discuss in small group and opportunities for questions and answers.
Boomer	None of the Boomers made any constructive comments to enhance the effectiveness of the seminar.
Buster	Two Busters suggested the use of video clips within the presentation. Three Busters reported the need for more time to discuss in groups and share personal experiences. One Buster questioned the exposition of John 21 and another Buster had a particular question regarding a characteristic of the Bridger generation. Three Busters did not offer any constructive suggestions.
Bridger	Once again the Bridger suggested to only briefly mention the “expert opinion.”

In keeping with the characteristics of the various generations, two Busters commented on including video clips to help enhance the overall effectiveness of the seminar while three additional Busters reported the need to discuss more personal experiences in small groups.

At the bottom of the evaluation form space was provided for “Additional Comments.” On eighteen out of nineteen forms, the participants either said nothing or offered a word of gratitude and encouragement for the work behind this seminar. The nineteenth participant commented that I need to speak with more authority and confidence regarding the content of this presentation. His comment is accurate and insightful, and it will be remembered when this seminar is repeated in the future.

Final Conclusions

Fundamentally, preaching is the communication of God's Word to a particular group of people. The groups of people to which preachers speak are becoming more diverse and different. In many congregations the number of generations is growing and the divide between the generations is widening. Through the experience of this thesis-project, my resolve to effectively communicate with the multiple generations in the congregation has intensified. I neither desire to be a preacher who can only relate effectively to one or two generations, nor do I want to only preach out of the bias of my own generational experiences. I have learned to make an intentional effort to apply and illustrate the biblical truth of a particular text outside of my generation. I have gained a new level of appreciation, respect, and understanding for the Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers in Owenton, Kentucky. I have a deeper understanding for why people do what they do and think what they think. The general characteristics of the generations described throughout this thesis-project find relevance and accuracy in my ministry setting. Because of this process I have gained an understanding of the different value systems and priorities among the various generations. I have also begun to realize how these various systems of thought and opinion impact the way people listen to sermons.

I have also concluded that bringing an end to this thesis-project does not mean the end of my research and reflection upon this subject. This five-chapter paper is not the end of the road. I have embarked on much more than merely the completion of a theological degree. I have engaged in a life-long venture that will not see its final destination for many years. Effectively communicating to a multigenerational

audience is challenging, but it is not impossible. Connecting the sermon to the real life experiences of a Builder, Boomer, Buster, and Bridger will be a nagging drive in my personal study on a weekly basis for the rest of my preaching ministry. My experiences these past five years of residency work and the writing of the thesis-project have helped to shape, channel, and impact my preaching for decades. So let the next chapter begin!

APPENDIX ONE
SEMINAR POWERPOINT SLIDES

Communication that Connects:

Preaching to a
Multigenerational
Audience

Session #1

The Generational Divide

Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World by David Henderson

- Maintain a proper balance between biblical authority and audience sensitivity.
- "It is not our place to make the Bible relevant, but it is unquestionably our place to communicate the relevance of the Bible.
- "If we talk to secular people about the Bible, we lose them. If we talk to them about themselves from the pages of the Bible, we grab them."

Biblical Foundation for Multigenerational Preaching

- The Bible consistently demonstrates God's concern for people of every age, and God continually shows that the Bible can be understood by both young children and grown adults.
(Luke 18:15-17 and Deuteronomy 6)
- The clearest biblical picture of a multigenerational congregation is described in the Pastoral Epistles
(Titus 2:1-8 and I Timothy 5:1-2)

One Church Four Generations by Gary McIntosh

- Builder Generation
 - Born prior to 1946
 - Represent 19% of America's population
 - Today 62 years of age or older
- Boomer Generation
 - Born 1947-1964
 - Represent 28% of America's population
 - Today 44-61 years old
- Buster Generation
 - Born 1965-1983
 - Represent 24% of America's population
 - Today 25-43 years old
- Bridger Generation
 - Born 1984-2002
 - Represent 27% of America's population
 - Today 6-24 years old



Discussion Questions

- To what generation do you belong?
- What percentage of Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers are in the Sunday morning congregation where you preach?
- Does the church where you preach mirror the population demographic of our country or is there a large discrepancy among one or more of the generations within the church?

Builder Generation (born prior to 1946)

- Approximately 54 million people (19%).
- Influenced by the events of the Great War, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, and World War II.
- Value hard work
- Frugal, sacrificial, and financially conservative
- Highly Patriotic
- Loyalty and Commitment are high priorities
- Appreciate effort more than outcome

Builder Generation (born prior to 1946)

- Linear and logical thinkers – gave birth to the 3-point sermon.
- Vertical sermons
 - Vertical sermons stress the exposition of the Bible and it aims to touch the person's mind.
 - Traditional messages, in-depth Bible studies, evangelistic sermons with a strong appeal for commitment are effective.
 - “Builders like to nod in agreement with the truth they already know.”

Boomer Generation (born 1946-1964)

- Approximately 74-76 million people (28%).
- Tremendous economic, educational, and technological growth following World War II.
- Influenced by the invention of the television, the events of the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Vietnam War, and Watergate.
- Widespread disillusionment and mistrust of authority (government, military, corporate America, and the church).
- The most studied generation in American history and often described as rebellious, self-absorbed, affluent, and independent.

Boomer Generation (born 1946-1964)

- While 9 out of 10 boomers were raised in a religious tradition, 60% dropped out of church for a period of two or more years during their adolescence or adulthood.
- Interested in churches that will meet their needs and are attracted to churches with high quality programs and facilities.
- Appreciate excellence more than effort
- Horizontal sermons
 - Horizontal sermons stress the practical application of the Bible and are oriented to touching people's hearts.
 - Boomers can appreciate the old, old story but they want to be challenged with something they do not already know.
 - Boomers want to know how the truth of the Bible will improve their lives throughout the week.

Buster Generation (born 1965-1983)

- Approximately 66 million people (24%)
- Impact of *Roe v. Wade* (1973)
- Influenced by the events of the *Challenger* explosion, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the devastating effects of the sexual revolution (AIDS/S.T.D.), the increased divorce rate, “latch-key” kids, and dilemmas such as world hunger, the national deficit, and homelessness.
- Busters long for genuine relationships and a sense of belonging.
- Busters have been taught that there are no absolutes, morality is relative, and truth is subjective.
- Gary McIntosh writes, “An absence of good values, the frustration of isolation, and the emptiness of their lives are all leading many Busters on a spiritual search.”

Buster Generation (born 1965-1983)

- Identify with sermons that are honest, straightforward, and direct.
- Since Busters long for community and meaningful relationships, it is a requirement that preachers live their story with observable authenticity, integrity, and humility.
- Narrative sermons
 - Storytelling is effective because everyone has a story worth hearing
 - “Sermons steeped in reasoned arguments do not resonate with Busters, but sermons take on meaning when packaged in a story context that conveys the same truth.”
 - Intimacy and interaction are high priorities for Busters and they appreciate the opportunity to break into small groups for prayer or discussion.

Buster Generation (born 1965-1983)

In an interview with Michael Duduit of *Preaching* magazine, George Barna says...

"The buster generation (those born since 1965) is a very spiritually intense generation. A major difference is that it is the first American generation – at least that I can tell – that has ever had a starting point for their spiritual journey that was not Christianity. In the past you started with Christianity, and you probably ended up there. And if you started there but it didn't work for you, at least you had that Christian experience. Now we increasingly see people under the age of thirty who started in other places – maybe with Eastern mysticism, maybe with the Muslim faith, maybe with Buddhism, or another faith system – and, if their systems don't work, then they may get around to Christianity. But it is no longer a given that one starts with Christianity and branches out."

Bridger Generation (born 1984-2002)

- Approximately 74 million people (27%).
- Influenced by the events of September 11, 2001, technological advancements, and the effects of postmodernism.
- McIntosh describes postmodernism as the worldview where "value is placed on diversity, justice, and tolerance of multiple points of view. Truth is found by giving serious consideration to inclusive, interactive, complex systems of thought."

Bridger Generation (born 1984-2002)

- Postmodernism is both divergent and paradoxical.
- Postmodernism is the rejection of absolute truth and the acceptance of subjective truth and moral relativism.
- Postmodernists have concluded that neither reason, science, nor divine revelation provides objective, absolute truth.
- Postmodernists claim that all religions are equally valid providing something positive to say and no one religion has a monopoly on spiritual truth.

Bridger Generation (born 1984-2002)

Once again in his interview with Michael Duduit, George Barna succinctly captures the spirit of postmodernism when he says...

“What used to take place did so because we were such a homogeneous population. You could throw out the shingle and let people know we were in business and pretty much everybody who lived in the community was similar in some key ways. You no longer have that luxury. Now if you've got 100,000 people who live in the community, you probably have 100,000 different lifestyles and value systems.”

Bridger Generation (born 1984-2002)

- Authenticity is the benchmark of quality for the Bridger generation.
- Relationships are highly valued.
- Many Bridgers have a longing to belong even before they come to a point of belief.
- Authentic Christian life speaks louder than a Bible study.
- Preacher must answer, “Why is Christianity the only way to God?”

Discussion Questions

- Based upon your experience, do these descriptions accurately portray the different generations?
- What impact does this diversity among generations have upon preaching?



On any given Sunday...

The **Builders** ask the preacher, "Will you challenge me today by reminding me of solid biblical truth?"

The **Boomers** ask the preacher, "Will you show me how the truth of what you have to say will help me in my life?"

The **Busters** say to the preacher, "If you are not going to be genuine and real, then do not waste my time telling me your truth."

The **Bridgers** ask the preacher, "What is truth?"

The “Expert” Opinion

According to George Barna...

“It would be very, very difficult for the same church to reach the Boomer and Buster. First of all, there is an animosity between the generations. Second, their styles of communication are different. Third, the ways in which they define success are different. Fourth their lifestyles are very different. I have looked at a lot of churches that claim they are reaching both generations and, frankly, when you come right down to it there are at best a handful of churches around the country that are doing it well. I think you almost have to develop independent congregations, which may be under the same umbrella. It may all be ‘First Church,’ but there is probably a congregation of boomers, a congregation of busters, a congregation of builders, and a congregation of seniors all under that umbrella.”

The “Expert” Opinion

According to William and Le Etta Benke in their book entitled “The Generation Driven Church”...

“The preponderance of evidence; however, seems to indicate that generationally segmented worship may be the best strategy for reaching today’s unchurched masses.”

The “Expert” Opinion

According to Bob Whitesel and Kent Hunter in their book entitled “A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church”...

We propose a Tri-Generational church. A Tri-Generational church is a “holistic congregation with three distinct generational sub-congregations peacefully existing under one roof, one name, and one leadership core.”

Four points of Connection

1. Preachers should layer sermonic illustrations and applications broadly yet specifically.
2. Preachers must learn to visualize the audience even in sermon preparation.
3. Preachers must learn ways to listen to their listeners.
4. Preachers must utilize some basic journalistic principles in sermon preparation and delivery.

1. *Layering sermon illustrations and applications broadly yet specifically*

- Whitesel and Hunter write, "If a pastor were delivering a sermon to these three [generational] groups simultaneously, the sermon might have to have three separate applications to meet the different needs or aspirations of each generation."
- Andrew Carl Wisdom says that one of the worst mistakes preachers can make is to attempt to "preach broadly to the middle of the congregation and hope it will land on as many as possible."
- Donald Miller likened preaching to shooting quail. "If you aim for all the birds, you hit none, but if you aim for one, you are likely to get several."
- In his article entitled *Preaching to Everyone in Particular*, Haddon Robinson writes, "The surprising thing is that the more directed and personal a message, the more universal it becomes."
- Layering can be accomplished by either providing multiple, independent illustrations like pearls on a string or by utilizing one illustration that intersects with multiple generations.

2. *Visualizing the audience in sermon preparation*

Thomas Long writes in his book entitled *The Witness of Preaching...*

It is not enough, though, to go to the Bible only with our own lives in view. We must self-consciously embody the needs and situations of others, especially those who are different from ourselves. Some preachers find it helpful, as part of the process of interpreting the scripture, to visualize the congregation that will be present when the sermon is preached. They survey the congregation in their mind's eye, seeing there the familiar faces and the lives behind them. They see the adults and the children, the families and those who are single, those who participate actively in the church's mission and those who stand cautiously on the edges of the church's life. They see those for whom life is full and good and those for whom life is composed of jagged pieces. They see the regulars sitting in their customary places, and they see the stranger, the newcomer, the visitor, hesitating and wondering if there is a place for them. They see the people who are there, and they see the people who cannot be there, or who choose not to be there. When preachers turn to the scripture, all these people go with them. Other preachers invite members of the congregation actually to participate with them in exploring the biblical text, gathering a small group early in the sermon development process to listen to the text, to study it together, to raise questions about it, and to name the concerns it evokes.

2. Visualizing the audience in sermon preparation

In an article entitled *Preaching to Ordinary People*, Lewis Smedes writes...

A man and woman, sitting board-straight, smiling on cue at every piece of funny piety, are hating each other for letting romance in their marriage collapse on a tiring treadmill of tasteless, but always tidy tedium.

A widow, whispering her Amens to every promise of divine providence, is frightened to death because the unkillable beast of inflation is devouring her savings.

A father, the congregational model of parental firmness, is fuming in the suspicion of his own fatherly failure because he cannot stomach, much less understand, the furious antics of a slightly crazy son.

An attractive young woman in the front pew is absolutely paralyzed, sure she has breast cancer.

A middle-aged fellow who, with his new Mercedes, is an obvious Christian success story, is wondering when he will ever have the guts to tell his boss to take his lousy job and shove it.

A submissive wife of one of the elders is terrified because she is being pushed to face up to her closet alcoholism.

Ordinary people, all of them, and there are a lot more where they came from.

Discussion Questions

- (Group 1) Specifically layer an application of the Big Idea from Psalm 51 to a Builder, Boomer, Buster, and Bridger.
- (Group 2) Visualize and describe at least one person from each generation in your congregation to whom Psalm 51 would be applied.

3. *Listening to the Listeners*

In his book entitled *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* Roger Van Harn suggests enlisting up to four congregation members to keep a four-week journal...

Each day the participants are to describe something of importance that occurred in their life that day (event, experience, thought, fear, need, question, or doubt).

Each day the participants are to record specific words of faith that were important to him that day (Bible, song, creed, book, or another person).

On Sunday the participants are to complete the following statements.

- The sermon was about...
- The sermon enabled me to believe that...
- The sermon asked that I...
- The sermon made me feel...

3. *Listening to the Listeners*

Another way to listen to listeners is by utilizing focus groups.

A focus group consists of 6-8 people representing a congregational cross-section of generations, genders, church involvement, and socio-economic distinctions.

For a Father's Day sermon based on Psalm 127 the following six questions were asked to a focus group of six individuals.

1. What makes a good father?
2. What is a father's greatest challenge today?
3. Do you think that fatherhood has changed in the last fifty years?
4. What are areas of improvement for fathers in our community?
5. How does a person's relationship with his/her earthly father influence that person's perception of the Heavenly Father?
6. How does Psalm 127 speak to fathers today?

4. Utilize Basic Journalistic Principles

From the book entitled *Preaching that Connects: Using Journalistic Techniques to Add Impact* by Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson.

Five Journalist Principles

1. The introduction must arrest the attention of the audience.
 “Fail here and we imply that we will be talking about a subject rather than speaking to living, breathing, feeling, needy people. Succeed here and people will be unable to pull away from your sermon.”
2. Illustrate more than explain.
 “Being specific means saying *Luger*, rather than *weapon*; ‘89 *Taurus*, rather than *vehicle*; *adultery*, rather than *sin*; *the nails through Christ’s palms*, rather than *Christ’s sufferings*; *Bob, the 45-year-old, overweight Chicago detective with the scar on the back of his hand*, rather than *the officer*. The gunpowder is in specifics, the more precise the better.

4. Utilize Basic Journalistic Principles

3. Put a face on the story.
 A journalist associated with the show *60 Minutes* said, “The producers never do a story about an issue unless they can find a person to tie that issue to.”
4. Show rather than Tell.
 “Johnny was mad,” is telling. “Johnny turned red, clenched his teeth, and pounded his fist on the table,” is showing.
 “Goliath’s sword was heavy,” is telling. “David strained to raise Goliath’s sword over his head,” is showing.
5. Be strategic in word selection.
 “Plain words create plain sermons while artistic words help to create interesting sermons.”

Discussion Questions

- (Group 1) Formulate five questions that could be used in a multigenerational focus group discussion for John 21.
- (Group 2) Craft a multigenerational introduction for John 21 utilizing at least two of the five journalistic principles.

APPENDIX TWO

CASE STUDY 1

Psalm 51

By the time David was fifty years old he was a success by anyone's standard. As a teenager he had defeated Goliath and at the age of thirty he was installed as Israel's king. For two decades, he demonstrated brilliant leadership both on the battlefield and in the palace. At this stage of life, David must have felt invincible. Perhaps it was this feeling of invincibility that kept David in Jerusalem on that spring evening when most kings go off to war. In II Samuel 11:2-3, we read, "One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her." David discovered that she was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah, the Hittite. Uriah was one of David's most trusted soldiers. David threw all caution to the wind. He burned with passion for this woman, called for her, and the king of Israel slept with Bathsheba.

Weeks later, David received word that Bathsheba was pregnant and David devised a plan to bring Uriah home from the field in order that Uriah might spend a night with his wife. Uriah refused to enjoy the romantic company of his wife for he said that there were many soldiers in the field fighting for God and country. Uriah asked his king, "How can I go home and lie with my wife?" David insisted. Uriah repeatedly refused. Not to be outsmarted by Uriah, David wrote a letter and sealed it with his ring saying, "Place Uriah in the front of the line where the fighting is fiercest and when the battle becomes intense back away so that Uriah might be struck and killed." The events occurred just as David had devised. After a time of mourning, Bathsheba came to the palace and became David's wife.

Sometime later, the Lord sent the prophet named Nathan to speak to the king. Through a powerful story, Nathan revealed that God was displeased with David's actions of lust, immorality, deceit, and murder. David was overwhelmed with remorse and repentance. Perhaps later that night, David entered his study and penned Psalm 51. In this Psalm, David is honest in his confession to the LORD. He asks for God to cleanse and to create within him something brand new. He promises to teach others about the LORD and declare praise to God. The big idea of Psalm 51 is that no sin is too gross for God's grace.

Discussion Questions

Divide the entire group into two groups. Utilizing this case study from Psalm 51, ask each group to perform the assigned task listed below.

- (Group 1) *Specifically layer the application of the Big Idea from Psalm 51 to a Builder, Boomer, Buster, and Bridger.*
- (Group 2) *Visualize and describe at least one person from each generation in your congregation to whom Psalm 51 would be applied.*

APPENDIX THREE CASE STUDY 2

John 21

In preparation for this sermon, a character study of the Apostle Peter was conducted. Regardless of whether Peter was in Caesarea Philippi saying to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” or in the upper room reassuring Jesus that he would not deny Jesus even if he had to die for him, Peter was a disciple who was always ready to verbalize his opinion. He was the boisterous, vocal, domineering leader of this rag-tag, redneck group of disciples from Galilee.

In John 21, Peter’s decision to go fishing represents more than just a relaxing way to spend a sunny Tuesday afternoon. Before meeting Jesus, Peter was a fisherman by trade; therefore, Peter is making a declaration that he is going back to his former way of life. He had already disappointed the LORD by denying him three times.

Peter is as surprised as anyone to discover that it is the resurrected Jesus standing on the shores of the Sea of Galilee asking them if they had caught any fish. During the breakfast on the beach no one dared to ask of Jesus, “Who are you?” Thomas starred in disbelief, Nathanael was tongue-tied, and Peter was speechless. Peter could barely even look in the general direction of Jesus as he choked down the broiled fish. You can imagine the lump that clogged his throat when it is Jesus who asks to speak to him personally and privately.

Jesus is about to leave this earth and the global missions effort will be in the hands of people like Peter; therefore, what Peter believes about Jesus at this moment is crucial. The best way to demonstrate love for someone is to love what they love; therefore, Jesus repeatedly asks Peter, “Do you love me.” Jesus, who is earlier described in this gospel as the shepherd of the sheep, tells Peter, “Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, and feed my sheep.” The big idea of the passage communicates that the best way to show love to Jesus is to love what Jesus loves and throughout the Gospel it is clear that Jesus loves people.

Discussion Questions

Divide the entire group into two groups. Utilizing this case study from John 21, ask each group to perform the following tasks.

- (Group 1) *Formulate five questions that could be used in a multigenerational focus group discussion for John 21.*
- (Group 2) *Craft a multigenerational introduction for John 21 utilizing at least two of the five journalistic principles.*

APPENDIX FOUR EVALUATION FORM

Communication that Connects: Preaching to a Multigenerational Audience

The purpose of this evaluation is to obtain information regarding the content and presentation of this seminar. Please answer all the questions carefully and honestly. Your immediate feedback is very much appreciated. You DO NOT need to place your name on this form. Thanks!

1. To what generation do you belong?
 - A. Builder
 - B. Boomer
 - C. Buster
 - D. Bridger
2. Is the audience to which you routinely preach a multigenerational congregation?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
3. How many years have you been preaching?
 - A. Less than five years
 - B. Between 6-15 years
 - C. Between 16-25 years
 - D. Between 26-39 years
 - E. More than 40 years

For questions 4-12 please indicate the degree you agree or disagree.

Strongly Agree (1)....(2)....(3)....(4)....(5) Strongly Disagree

4. ____ This seminar was communicated in an interesting manner.
5. ____ This seminar was organized in a way that made sense to me.
6. ____ I found the descriptions of the various generations to be accurate and insightful.
7. ____ The four recommended ways to connect with the audience were clearly explained.
8. ____ I believe the four recommendations from this seminar are “doable.”
9. ____ In light of this seminar, I will be more intentional in communicating to the various generations within the congregation beginning this Sunday.
10. ____ Before tonight’s seminar, I rarely considered the different generations in my weekly sermon preparation.
11. ____ After attending this seminar, I feel more confident to speak effectively to the multiple generations of my congregation.
12. ____ The seminar maintained a good balance of lecture and group discussion.

(Turn Page)

Please answer the following using the space provided.

13. Do you feel this seminar will make a difference in your preaching? If so, in what way?
14. What was the most helpful part of this seminar?
15. What was the least helpful portion of the seminar?
16. Which of the four suggested ways to connect with the audience will be the easiest for you to implement in your sermon preparation? Why?
17. Which of the four suggested ways to connect with the audience will be the most challenging for you to implement in your sermon preparation? Why?
18. With regard to either the content or presentation, what are two positive comments you could make?
19. With regard to either the content or presentation of this seminar, what are two suggestions you would make to enhance its effectiveness?

Additional Comments:

Thank you very much for taking the time to attend this seminar and to fill out this survey.

APPENDIX FIVE

EVALUATION FORM BACK-UP DATA

1. To what generation do you belong?
 - A. Builder (3)
 - B. Boomer (4)
 - C. Buster (11)
 - D. Bridger (1)

2. Is the audience to which you routinely preach a multigenerational congregation?
 - A. Yes (18)
 - B. No (1)

3. How many years have you been preaching?
 - A. Less than five years (7)
 - B. Between 6-15 years (7)
 - C. Between 16-25 years (1)
 - D. Between 26-39 years (2)
 - E. More than 40 years (2)

Question	Builder	Boomer	Buster	Bridger
#4	1,1,1	1,1,1,1	1,1,2,1,1,1,1,1,5,1,1	2
#5	1,1,1	1,1,1,1	1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,5,1,1	1
#6	1,1,2	1,2,2,1	1,2,1,1,1,1,1,2,4,1,1	2
#7	1,1,1	1,1,1,1	1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,5,1,1	1
#8	2,1,1	1,2,1,1	2,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,5,2,1	2
#9	1,1,1	1,2,2,1	1,1,1,1,1,3,1,3,3,1,1	2
#10	3,3,1	1,2,4,4	5,1,4,5,3,3,4,3,2,4,5	2
#11	2,2,3	1,2,2,2	2,1,2,1,1,4,1,1,3,2,1	2
#12	1,1,1	1,1,1,1	4,1,2,1,1,1,1,1,5,2,1	2

Open Response Questions

13. Do you feel this seminar will make a difference in your preaching? If so, in what way?

- I hope so.
- Yes, searching for area to line up with the message.
- Yes, I am reminded of preparation skills that may have been less intentional than they should have.
- I hope so.
- It has made me think about the people in the pew.
- Since I don't preach regularly it will not impact as much as other. But it helps me greatly in looking at the congregation as I preach.
- The four recommendations are 'fresh' tools for me. The challenge was encouraging.
- Yes, in the way I will layer the illustration.

- Yes, it has helped me think through how much more intentional I must be in applying Scripture.
- Yep. I will be more aware of the generations during the prep time.
- I will be more purposeful in visualizing and ultimately engaging each generation.
- Yes, I know that audience analysis is important but I needed this reminder to focus on my audience.
- Yes, teaching and song leading.
- To be able to grab the people.
- In sermon and study preparation.
- Yes, I'll watch myself a little closer to better target each generation.
- Yes, the greatest impact will be on grabbing the attention from the open and being intentional in my illustrations to reach a broader group.
- Yes, simply being mindful of my listeners.

14. What was the most helpful part of this seminar?

- Journalistic principles
- Shared insight from lecture, Bro. Daven, and participants
- Identifying the generational groups.
- Thought provoking
- The journalistic principles
- The application i.e. recommendations
- The generation breakdown
- Understanding how different the 4 generations are
- The journalistic principles
- The picture of the different generations
- The journalistic emphasis for our sermons
- Breakdown of multiple generations
- To figure out the different people in the church and where they are
- Journalistic principles and generational differences
- Explanation of each generation
- Layering and the input of the journalistic view.
- Journalistic principles

15. What was the least helpful portion of the seminar?

- The four divisions of people was generally applied and very broad in nature.
- All was helpful
- All aspects were helpful
- Break
- Group discussions because of time
- Statistical data in the beginning
- I'm not sure. It was pretty good.
- Barna's opinions. I would prefer to hear from the instructor's point of view.
- Expert opinions could have taken less time/merely explained

16. Which of the four suggested ways to connect with the audience will be the easiest for you to implement in your sermon preparation? Why?

- Visualizing the audience
- Journalistic principles and common media stories that will probably be one most heard of the week.
- Putting a face/picture on ideas, comments being shared.
- Listen to the listeners
- The journalistic principles
- Layering the sermon illustration
- Listening to my listeners. At least it is a big need of mine.
- Journalistic principles
- Layered illustration/application – there are an abundance of scenarios you could use to hit home with people
- Listening to your listeners – you can understand more felt needs.
- Visualizing the generations because our congregation is small enough for me to know the people and think about them during sermon prep.
- To listen to the listeners through the questions seems most non-threatening.
- Using the media examples in song leading to hold attention and bridge the generation gap.
- To put a face or story of today with the Bible. So the people of all ages can get interested in it with me.
- Visualizing the audience. This will help me see and remember the people I'm trying to connect with.
- Story telling – I'm a good storyteller and getting their attention – I appreciate shock value.
- Visualizing in the opening mixed with layering to draw in the focus of the congregation. It makes sense, is effective, and falls in line with my gift set.
- Visualizing the audience, doesn't take much time.

17. Which of the four suggested ways to connect with the audience will be the most challenging for you to implement in your sermon preparation? Why?

- Layering sermon illustrations.
- Understanding congregation needs in each group
- Listening – often I am preaching in a supply, without regular contact with that congregation.
- Utilizing basic principles
- Listening to people
- Listening to your listeners. I don't have a congregation to listen to.
- Layering sermon materials.
- Layering illustrations
- Establishing a focus group – takes more time and willing people which might be difficult to obtain.
- Layering the illustrations – takes more time.

- The arresting illustration/introduction – because I struggle with illustrations generally.
- Enlisting four people to journal. Seems like more work than my people will put out.
- To bring all together where it will relate to them so they will pay attention.
- Layering illustrations – to figure out a way to get everyone on the same page.
- Visualizing each generation (faces) and developing each of those illustrations. I'm not creative.
- Communicating with builders. Much of their thought process seems empty and foreign to me.
- Listening to listeners. I have to bring in other people and pull them out of comfort zone.

18. With regard to either the content or presentation, what are two positive comments you could make?

- Both were done exceptionally well
- Having positive contact with the congregation and mindful of each group area of life.
- Both content and presentation were focused, interesting, and thought provoking
- Content was great and so was the presentation.
- Well prepared and delivered.
- This makes you look at how you preach and how you prepare your sermons.
- Daven is an effective communicator. Good group participation.
- Well thought out and relative
- The content presented showed extensive study and preparation and the points were illustrated well.
- Great research and thanks for sharing this vital information to strengthen our preaching.
- Well prepared and well communicated.
- Very interesting to listen to – concept of preaching to different generations needs to be researched and I'm thankful for the info.
- Interesting in the manner it was presented. My attention was held along with the builder I sat next to.
- The information was very insightful and very well broken down to be understanding.
- Organized and clearly presented.
- Very accurate, clear, and challenging.
- Great flow and well organized and has instant, practical, positive implications.
- There was a lot of effort in the research and simple suggestions on how to improve.

19. With regard to either the content or presentation of this seminar, what are two suggestions you would make to enhance its effectiveness?

- A little more time.
- More questions and answers sessions.
- Perhaps more focus group work.
- None really. Time went fast and enjoyable.
- Visual enhancement (video)
- Smaller groups and more time for discussion of case studies.
- Could be longer
- The exposition of John 21 is questionable. The discussion groups could be done away with.
- Describe a particular boomer, builder, buster, and bridger. Answer how we connect to a bridger who doesn't want commitment without full involvement. How do we let someone enjoy membership and all its benefits without making a commitment?
- I think it was wonderful. I couldn't think of a thing.
- None.
- Discussion from each others experiences (perhaps?)
- One video illustration in each section to break up the monotony and create a mental image of application.
- Only mention expert opinion briefly.

Additional Comments:

- Thank you for including me.
- Very good. Good ideas to think and ponder. Thanks for inviting me to hear this.
- Good job. Study and preparation was evident.
- This was very useful.
- Thank you.
- I'd listen to this again. Good stuff!!
- The content is fantastic but the speaker needs to present it with more authority and confidence in content. No explanations of possible second guesses....speak in absolutes.

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